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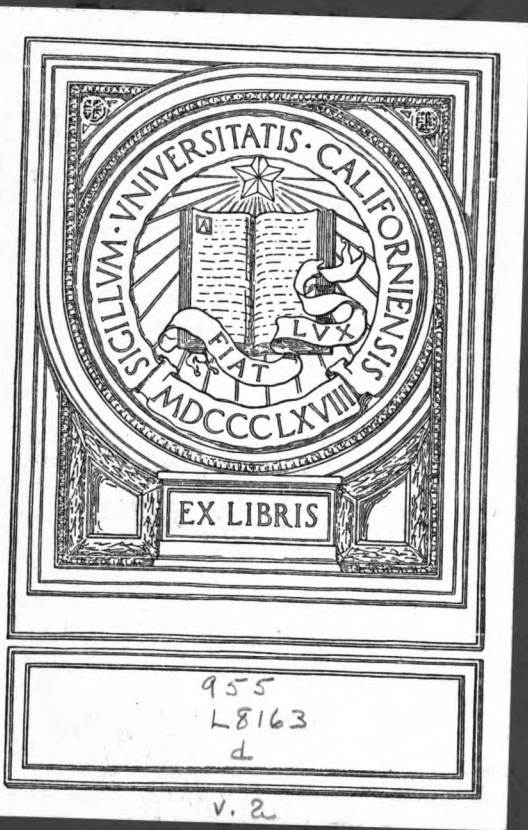
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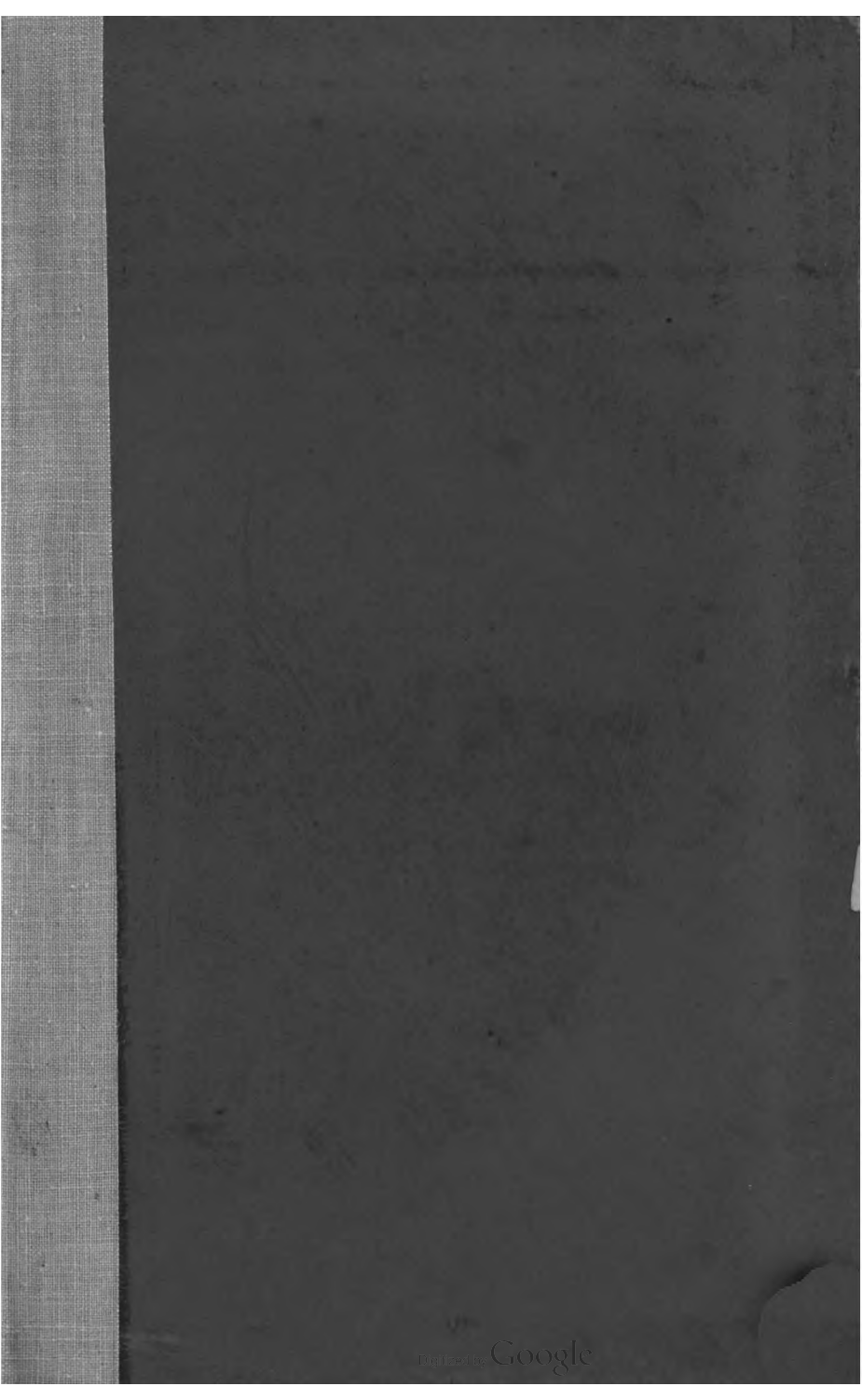
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Doubles and quits

Laurence William Maxwell Lockhart,
St. George Tucker





DOUBLES AND QUITTS

DOUBLES AND QUILTS

BY

LAURENCE W. M. LOCKHART

LATE CAPTAIN 92D HIGHLANDERS

WITH TWELVE ILLUSTRATIONS

BY

SYLVESTRIS

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II.

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS

EDINBURGH AND LONDON

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ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN BLACKWOOD'S MAGAZINE

TO MY
FRIEND

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DOUBLES AND QUILTS.



CHAPTER X.

BURRIDGE'S STORY CONTINUED.

“And all
Her falser self slipped from her like a robe.”

—TENNYSON.

“From all such devils, good Lord, deliver us.”

—*Taming of the Shrew.*

“I NEEDN'T bore you with the march up. At Benares they took us and sent us off with a 'flying column,' and we were dodging about after rebels for nine weeks; then we got to Allahabad, and off again on another cruise, and so on we were handed about from one place to another, and all through Central India. The detachment was separated and

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broken up by this time, for they boned men and officers just as they wanted them, and didn't care what regiment you belonged to, and whether you were cavalry, infantry, or artillery—but you know all that. I had very affectionate letters from Carlotta every now and then; to read them you would have believed that she spent half her time in praying for me, and the other half in bullying the post-office authorities about not getting my letters regularly.

“It was a horrid campaign—nothing but marches and forced marches—pelting away after the mutineers in the heat of the sun, just as if we were in Northern Europe—night-alarms and day-alarms—short commons and long fasts—fever, ague, cholera, and sunstroke,—that was about the programme. Deuced little fighting. Now and then we got a chance, and blazed at them at long range; and sometimes, when they were two hundred to one, they would stand

up to their guns—then there was a rush and a little bayoneting ; but it was all over in a minute or two, and they were off like the wind, and it had all to begin again—padding away after the beggars, and all for no satisfaction. I was sick of it, and uncommon glad when we were ordered into quarters. Then I joined my new regiment. They were at Wallahbad, a small station near the hills. I had never seen them all this time, for they had been cruising in another direction. I liked them—they were a good set of fellows ; and when I joined I found I had just got my troop. Promotion was going fast then (the sun had something to say to that, and cholera a good deal) ; but as I was an infantry fellow, I had the drill and riding-school business to go through, and that was a bore. Somehow I couldn't make up my mind to tell the fellows I was married, and I was so young no one would have dreamt of it. I was desperately

unwilling that Carlotta should come up, and always wanted her to put off and off. I told her I was kept so busy with the drill and riding-school it was no good her coming up yet a while, and that she had better stay where she was. So she did for a bit; but I suppose she got sick of it, for all of a sudden up she came without any warning. That put me in a nice fix, I can tell you. I remember her arrival so well. It was just after tiffin, and all the fellows were lounging about in the mess-compound, for it was coolish weather. The public road ran just past the compound; and all of a sudden some one sang out, 'Holloa! an arrival!—what's this?' and we looked, and there was a string of dâk gharries—four or five of them—covered with baggage and servants and things. This was a great excitement, and we all ran and looked over the wall; and the first gharrie—who do you think was in it? who but Kitty Coloony, my

wife's drunken Irish maid! She was drunk then, and drinking out of a black bottle, and a monkey and a parrot were cruising about loose in the trap with her. When she passed us she waved her hand and holloed out, 'The tap of the marnin' to ye, bhoys! Connemarra for iver!' and sank back into the gharrie, kicking her abominable heels up into the air. I remember a voice saying, 'It's the Queen of Sheba, and she's as drunk as an owl of the desert.' But my heart seemed to stand still, and I knew—but before I could think, up came the second gharrie, and there sure enough was Carlotta herself. She spotted me at once, halted the gharrie, jumped out like mad, and threw her arms round my neck over the compound wall, singing out, 'Darling Dolly! my chee-ild! my chee-ild! my Adolphus!' just as if she was on the stage.

"All the fellows roared; and I saw she was as drunk as Kitty Coloony. 'Who is

this woman, sir?' cried the Colonel to me (he was married, and a religious fellow); and I said, 'It's all right, sir; I'll put it all square.' I hardly knew what I was saying or doing, but I jumped the compound wall, bundled Carlotta into the gharrie, and told the whole caravan to drive to my bungalow. As we moved off I could see all the fellows doubled up with laughing; some of them kicking about in fits on the grass, and the Colonel marching into the mess-house with a face like a scourge. Well, there was a subaltern of mine, Fred Lascelles, shared the bungalow with me. When the procession arrived, Fred was sitting smoking in the verandah, and you should have seen his face. I had never told him about Carlotta, you know. He gave a view-holloa when he saw Kitty Coloony, and she jumped out and began to dance a jig; and Fred, who was a lively bird, joined her, and there they were capering away on the grass when I came

up. 'What does it all mean, Dolly?' he cried, holding his sides; and then he saw by my face there was something wrong; and I said, 'My wife's in the second gharrie, Fred, and I want you to turn out for her like a good fellow.' 'Your wife!' he said, with a queer twinkle in his eye. 'Walker! all right though, Dolly. I'll turn out in a jiffy.' 'Upon my honour, Fred, she's my married wife,' I said; and he went away in to order his servants to move his traps, muttering something about 'having cut his eye-teeth.'

"I got Carlotta quieted down, and to bed, and her baggage and niggers and monkeys and parrots and Kitty Coloony stowed away; and I was just sitting down to smoke a weed, and think over my troubles, when up came an orderly and told me that the Colonel wished to see me immediately. Off I went to the orderly-room—pretty savage I was too—and there was the Colonel look-

ing like thunder. 'What am I to understand, Captain Burridge?' he said, 'by the disgraceful scene we have just witnessed?' 'It wasn't my fault, sir,' I replied. 'How dare you bring that disreputable woman into my station, sir?' (He was commanding the station, too, you know.) 'She's my wife, sir; I suppose I have a right to bring her anywhere; and as to "disreputable," how dare *you* use that word?' 'She was drunk, sir,' said the Colonel, quailing a little though. 'She was not drunk—no man shall say she was; she was overcome by the heat. Is this all you have to say to me, Colonel Winthrop?' 'I beg your pardon, Captain Burridge, if she is really your wife.' 'She is really my wife, sir, upon my honour!' I replied. 'Then I beg your pardon, Captain Burridge.' But he spoke very coldly, and I knew he didn't believe she was my wife a bit. However, I could only say good-morning, and come away.

“The life I led there after this was dreadful. Carlotta had thrown off her mask altogether: her temper was awful—her language was abominable—and she constantly got drunk and insulted people. She wanted to call on all the ladies in the station, but I swore, if she did, that I would sell out and go to the backwoods of America, so she gave it up; but at the band she used to make remarks on the people in a loud voice, and stare impudently at the ladies and laugh in their faces, and turn round and sometimes call out things after them, so that I forbade her to go to the band. I couldn’t prevent it sometimes though; and at last, one evening when I was on guard, she took the opportunity of going there by herself. The collector of the district was there in his buggy—a fat old codger, awfully bumptious; and Carlotta, who was furiously drunk, rode up and asked him what the devil he meant by driving a white horse. He said he sup-

posed he might drive what kind of horses he pleased; and she said, 'No,' that that was his mistake, and that if she ever caught him there with anything but piebalds again, she would leather him within an inch of his life. Then the old fellow got in a rage and said, 'Leather away!' and she did—cut his face open with her whip, and broke his hat with the butt-end, and galloped off. You can imagine the row. The Colonel sent for me and said, 'Captain Burrige, I won't discuss with you whether the person under your protection is your wife or not. One thing is now certain, that she is disreputable and a public annoyance, and, being so, she shall not remain in my station. She must be out of it in twenty-four hours.' I could only say, 'I'm ashamed to repeat that she is my wife, but of course I quite see that she must go, and go she shall.'

"The next morning I had it out with her,—and such a shindy! She vowed she





V. L. L. E. M.

"He said 'leather away' & she did."

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wouldn't move, but I told her the Colonel would either have her locked up or removed by force ; so off she went, away down country, with Kitty Coloony and all the other beasts, back to Calcutta, to the house in Garden Reach, which I had kept on all the time. I didn't go with her, but I couldn't remain in the station—I was too ashamed ; so I got leave and went away to the hills for a cruise by myself, waiting till I could get an exchange. It was coming down again that I met your brother at Nynee Tal, and he took me for you, and that was the first I ever heard of you, Donald. At Nynee Tal I got a letter from the Calcutta agent, saying that my wife was spending a lot of money—too much, he thought—and had come and asked for £1000 in a lump. He had declined to give it to her without consulting me ; and was he to give it to her ? I wrote back to say No, not in a lump, but that he might pay for her any bills she

wanted paid, but not to give her more than £100 at a time. I didn't know what tricks she might be up to. I remained at Nynee Tal and Simla for a bit, and then I got another letter from the agent (none from Carlotta all this time) saying that she had come again for the £1000, and that when he told her my decision she was very abusive; and that her brother, who was with her and intoxicated, had also abused and struck him; and that therefore he had felt compelled to transfer the agency in the mean time to other hands, as he could not have transactions with such a person; and, on the whole, he thought I had better come down without delay. Down I went post-haste. I had never heard of her brother before, and I was naturally inquisitive about him, you see. I sent no warning to Carlotta, and arrived in Garden Reach one morning about seven o'clock.

“The sitting-rooms were to the back of

the house, and I got in without her hearing, and walked straight into a morning-room that opened on to a verandah and garden. There I saw a sight that astonished me. Carlotta was there in a dressing-gown, with her hair down, with bloodshot eyes and a white sodden face—so old and haggard and blackguard-looking, just like the horrid figures you see prowling out and in the gin-palaces in London; and opposite her—who do you think was sitting opposite her? with nothing but a flannel shirt and peijamas on—a short pipe in his mouth—unshaven—dirty—drunk—who? who but Count Arnold Doldorouski. I stopped at the door stupefied. Carlotta, who had a large tumbler of liquor in her hand, threw it down and jumped up with a scream when she saw me. She could still act though, and well, and she recovered herself in an instant, and rushed towards me to embrace me. I couldn't stand that, and pushed her away. Then she cried

out, 'What! not one fond embrace in the moment of my joy! The Count has just arrived with the happy, happy tidings; my father is delivered from the mine, and resumes his name and place in society! Rejoice with me, my Adolphus! rejoice! rejoice!' and she threw her eyes up and clasped her hands. All this time the Count had never risen, but sat blinking at me through his tobacco-smoke. When she had done he croaked out, 'Stow that gammon; it's a cock that won't fight. I'm sick of it, and I'm going to split; I am, by gum!' Carlotta looked flabbergasted for a moment, and then said to me, 'The fatigue of travel, the excitement, the heat, have unhinged his poor mind; I must rally him.' Then, turning to the ruffian (and I saw her wink at him), she said, in her theatrical way, 'How, my lord! your lordship strangely forgets yourself! Seek a little repose now, and you will recount the happy tidings afterwards.'

He has come,' she explained to me, 'through the wilds of Russia and in by the north of India, riding night and day to relieve my mind—was it not good and key-ind and noble? Go, my lord, and repose a while.' His lordship, however, declined to go, and again repeated that he was sick of the gammon, and would split; and then he started up and began to sing a bit of that extravaganza song, 'I'm not the Queen, ha! ha! I'm not the Queen, ha! ha!' and added, 'No, nor the Lord Mayor, nor the Archbishop of Canterbury, nor Count Bubblefrowsky, nor any lord. I'm Bill Whytock, I am; and I'll fight you for a pint and lick you for a quart, you d—d swaggering, officering noodle!' and then he took a long pull at his brandy-and-soda, and sat down.

"Carlotta saw the game wouldn't do and changed it at once, and said, 'Adolphus, forgive me; I have deceived you, but it was from a kind motive. This is my brother

William. Distress and poverty, from my father's long confinement, have brought him to what you see him. He had no asylum, no home, and he came to me. Forgive me. Can a sister turn her back upon a brother? Never.' 'She'd better not,' said the Count; 'but this is more like sense; so, Dolly, I look towards you, and I'll be your brother, if you like. Here's your health, you jolly green;' and he took another pull at his liquor, and reeled out of the room, remarking that he 'would go and have a little mirth with the parrots.' Then I had it out with Carlotta. She said her brother had been in want and distress, and had come out in desperation to look for her, without her sending for him. She feared he had got into wild drinking ways, but might be reclaimed if I would pay his passage home, and give him a couple of hundred pounds to start him in business. I said I would, provided he went off at once

by that day's mail, and I never saw him again; and she (she was tremendously agitated, but as meek as a lamb) went into another room and discussed the matter with the Count; and after a long wrangle she came back and said he was deeply grateful, and would go at once; and he did go. I made the agent pay his passage and see him on board, and I never set eyes on the ruffian again. A nice little domestic incident, wasn't it? My health was a good deal smashed with all the worry and distress I had gone through—and I had a doctor in, who said I must positively go to sea for a month. Accordingly I took a passage in a steamer going to Rangoon, and sailed two days after. Something went wrong with the screw or the boilers, and we had to put back, and I was in Calcutta again in a week. I went to the house in Garden Reach; my wife wasn't in: she was riding on the Course, the servants said. I went to my room to

change my dress, and requiring a pair of scissors, looked for them in a work-box of my wife's in the adjoining room, and there, lying open in the box, was a note beginning 'Angelic Being!' This was interesting, so I went on, and found it was from a fellow saying how he loved her, and asking why, loving him as she confessed she did, she would not consent to be his, and fly from that imbecile husband of hers, union with whom was a disgrace to a woman of her soul. He said his fond heart would not allow him to believe that her decision was final, and that he would come that night at seven o'clock to hear if she would not relent. It was signed 'Aaron Lewis,' and I saw by the date that the promised visit was to take place that very evening, and indeed in half an hour. So I assembled the servants, and told them that if they told their mistress I had come home, I would flay them all alive—not only the fellows who

told, but the entire household. Then I locked myself into an anteroom that opened on to the drawing-room, and waited.

“Presently in came my lady and ordered tea; as soon as she was settled I got a chink of the door open to see all that went on, and before long Mr Aaron Lewis was announced. You never saw such a thief to look at, Donald. He was a short, stout, thick-set fellow, with a neck like a bull, a head of hair like a black haystack, a nose like a pump-handle, and a nigger’s blubber lips. He was evidently a Jew, and a very bad dirty sort of Jew. When he came in he kissed his hand three times, skipped across the room, and went down with a bang on his knees before Carlotta. She gave him her hand like a stage empress, and he kissed it and said, ‘Relent! relent! and fly with me to love and joy.’ Then she put up her handkerchief to her eyes with one hand, and with the other stroked

his filthy hair, and warbled out, 'Tempt me not, my Aaron—tempt me not; be satisfied that my heart is thine, and wait! wait!' I suppose she thought I was seedy and going off the hooks, and she was hedging with this beast, and meant, wait till I was dead. 'If it is worldly prudence,' said the Jew, who was a deuced poetical kind of Jew—'if it is worldly prudence which stifles the emotions of that fond heart, dismiss it. I have wealth—I have gold—I have riches; I shower them at your feet!' and he butted his great bullet-head forward in his ecstasy and upset the teapot all over the place, and I swear I could hardly help laughing.

"Then they set to work and abused me. Lord! how they did pitch into me, and my follies and weaknesses! I can tell you, Donald, this woman I had married out of pity had no pity upon me. At last the Jew said, in a tragical voice, 'If he was here, if I saw him, I could not contain myself, I

would r-r-r-rend him from limb to limb,' and he rolled his eyes and gnashed his teeth like an ogre. 'Would you?' said I, stepping out. 'Well, here I am—rend away!' Wasn't the Jew taken aback! You should have seen his face. Then I took him by the scruff of the neck and kicked him up and down the room, and then I got a cutting-whip and let into him till he bellowed like a mad bull, and I took the butt and crashed into his head and face with it, and bundled him to the window when I was tired and tilted him out into the garden. Carlotta had fainted really, I believe; but she came to quick enough. I hadn't much to say to her, and I said it in a few words. She began her theatricals, but I said, 'Stop; I may be a noodle and an imbecile and a disgrace to be married to, but I'm not noodle enough to have anything more to do with you. This house will be shut up the day after to-morrow, you can make your own

arrangements in the mean time. To-morrow send a lawyer to meet mine at the agent's at twelve o'clock. They will draw up a deed of separation ; I wish to heaven it was a divorce, but you're too cunning for that. I shall settle £500 a-year on you. I am going to Europe next week ; if you should happen to be going that way and we meet, be good enough to remember we're total strangers ; but I sincerely hope I may never see your face again.' Then I got my traps together and went to the hotel. My wife had run up awful ties in Calcutta, and paying them off really dipped me, and I had to draw on my grandmother for an extra grant. She was a little astonished at my expenses, and I had to tell her a cock-and-bull story about the fearful mortality among my elephants—as if I kept a herd of a few hundreds all to myself. The good old soul paid up at once. I believe she imagines ever since that cavalry regiments

are mounted on elephants in India ; but that was better than that she should know all the shame and distress I went through, which would break her heart, I believe.

“ After a year at the depot, I went out to India again to the headquarters of my present regiment, and I spent three wretched years there, on the Madras side this time, principally at Bangalore. I have never seen Carlotta ; all I know is that her money is paid by my agents to some solicitors in London for her every half-year.

“ We came home about eighteen months ago, and that brings me down to my acquaintance with Mary.”

“ Well, Adolphus,” I said, “ I must say you have had uncommonly hard lines. One would almost say that *one* moral of your story at least is, ‘ Never act upon the impulse of kind feelings ; ’ but if you don’t mind telling me, I should like to know what happened the day after—I mean the day

you awoke and remembered your declaration to Miss Richmond."

"The next day I did not see her at all—it was impossible, for some reason or other. I lay in bed all the forenoon, in a very unhappy state, you may believe. At one time I thought of this millstone round my neck—this abominable woman, but for whom I might be the happiest fellow in the world; and then I thought of what I had said to Mary, and how on earth it was all to be unsaid; and then I kept saying to myself, 'You scoundrel, you villain, you black-guard, you've been and gone and done it, and you'll end in the hulks, which is just the place for you.' And then a thought came into my head, 'Was there no means of dissolving this marriage anyhow?' I had thought of this before a score of times, but had dismissed the idea always, because I knew anything I did would require to be public, and I couldn't bear the

thought of everybody knowing what an ass I had been; and, above all things, I wouldn't have my old grandmother know about the business. But now I had a reason—a very tremendous reason, you see—and I felt that I didn't care about the publicity; and as for my grandmother, she would get over it, provided only I could get rid of Carlotta for ever, and be able to go to Mary as an honest man. I thought away as hard as I could, but I haven't got many brains, you know, and it all came to nothing, of course. Tommy Carleton's brother, an Oxford fellow, was staying with us at the time. No end of a fellow to talk and lay down the law about everything. I'll be hanged if he didn't seem to know everything, and somehow, even when you agreed with him, he contrived to show you that you knew nothing and were wrong. At mess that night my mind was still running on the thought, 'Can I ever get rid of this

woman by any sort of dodge or contrivance of the law?' and it seemed to me that if anybody could give one a wrinkle on the subject, this devil of a brother of Tommy Carleton's, who knew everything, ought to be able. I must tell you that my regiment knew nothing about my marriage, only that there had been a queer story about a woman in India—ages ago. Well, I wanted to draw the Oxford man, and I was very cunning about it. I told him a story—my own story, or very like it—about a friend of mine—John Smith, I called him—being married to a woman—Susan Jones—when he was quite a lad, and didn't care for her, and about her being a drunken old scoundrel, and his wanting to get rid of her, and that he (J. S.) had written to me for my opinion (as a practical man) whether, if he became a Roman Catholic, the Pope could smash up his marriage by a bull or something,—this idea *had* occurred to me, and

I thought it happy. The Oxford man laughed very long and very loud, and said, 'Poor dear John Smith! his innocence is almost as singular as his name,' and did *I* mean to say that *I* was ignoramus enough to entertain such an idea? Of course I said 'No,' and that I only mentioned it as a capital joke; adding that I supposed J. S. was regularly cooked and dished, and could never get out of it. Then Tommy Carleton's brother looked awfully wise, and asked some questions.

"'What age was *this* Smith at the time of marriage?' I said, 'Nineteen, or there-by.' 'Where did the marriage take place?' and I said, 'Otaheite, one of the South Sea Islands'—why, I don't know. The Oxford man laughed at this, and asked if John Smith was a missionary; and I said, 'No, that he was only cruising about for a lark.' Then he asked if he had ever gone through a second ceremony. I said, 'No, he hadn't

seen the woman for years.' Then Tommy Carleton's brother folded himself back in his chair (I can see him now) and said, 'Tell your friend, tell *this* Smith that he is no more married than I am.' 'How?' I cried—I couldn't keep down my excitement. 'How!' said the Oxford man; 'why, take my word for it, I haven't eaten dinners at an inn for four terms for nothing. It's beyond the jurisdiction of Doctors' Commons—he was a minor—*cadant vincula*. Smith is a free bachelor, and Jones a free spinster. All he's got to do is to file a bill, you know. Presto! the thing's done. What a goose the fellow must have been not to come to me—I mean, to some lawyer—before, if he wanted to be quit of *this* Jones! He ought to give me a fee.' 'So he will,' I cried, wild with joy and gratitude—'so he will, the biggest you ever got—name your figure.' And all the fellows laughed;

they thought I was chaffing the Oxford man.

“I asked Tommy after dinner if his brother was a certainty, and Tommy said there was no mistake about *him*; that he was the cleverest fellow they had ever raised at Oxford, and that he couldn’t take his degree at present for the simple reason that no examiner there had the pluck to tackle him, but that the Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge was reading up, and hoped to be ready to have a round with him next term. Then as to law, though he had only eaten dinners for four terms at his inn (I’ll be hanged if I could see what staying at an hotel had to do with it), ‘the benchers’ were already afraid of him, and it was supposed he would be let ‘through’ without any more eating. I then asked Tommy’s brother what ‘Smith’ should do. ‘Put the case with the facts into his solicitor’s hands in town; he’ll file the bill, and it will all be

settled in a fortnight,' he said. I would have liked to give Tommy's brother a service of gold plate on the spot. At last, then, I was going to be free from my bondage, and Mary and I might be married as soon as ever 'the bill was filed.' I never could tell you, I needn't try to tell you, all I felt.

"By the by, you know the locket with A E I on it?—she was wearing it, you said, the other night. Well, that night I telegraphed to Emmanuel for the chastest ornament he had, and that locket came back by return of post. I met Mary the next night at a dance, and carried her off at once to a quiet corner to make my confession. I believe I was rather wild in my talk at first, and I remember she looked startled and surprised. I said, 'I love you, Mary, more than everything in the world, but I was a villain to tell you so.' 'How?' said Mary, with her eyes very wide. 'I'll tell

you,' I said; 'I was a villain the night before last when I told you that I loved you, and now I tell you I love you, and I'm not a villain; can you guess what I mean?' She said, 'No;' and it wasn't likely she should, was it? 'I thought I was married already, Mary;' I went on, 'when I first spoke to you' (Mary gave a gasp and turned deadly pale); 'but I needn't say *thought*, for I thought of nothing but you, and how I loved you, at the time. I *had* considered myself a married man—miserably married to a bad woman, whom I hadn't seen for years, and I was led away by my feelings to tell you of my love, which I had no right to do; and I would have been back to-day to confess, and go down on my knees for your forgiveness, but now everything is changed. I'm glad I was a villain, because I'm not a villain; and though I was married yesterday morning, I may say I'm a bachelor now,

and she's a spinster, for the bill will be filed and the whole thing settled in a fortnight.' Poor Mary couldn't follow me a bit, and seemed frightened and anxious to get away; but I implored her to sit down and I would be calm, and I told her the whole of my story from the beginning—this miserable story I've been telling you. She was terribly cut up, and cried, and was sorry for me, and didn't blame me a bit, and said she hoped the bill would be filed all right, but that if it wasn't she would never reproach me, but remain single all her life for my sake, and love me all the same, and never look at another fellow. And then I saw she was an angel, not only because of her beautiful eyes and golden hair, but because her heart was so good and kind and tender and true, as the angels are, don't you know?

“I didn't like to write to the family solicitor—indeed I didn't wish to write to

any one, but to state my case by word of mouth. So I got the address of a legal firm in good practice, and a week after went up to see them. In the mean time I saw Mary every day, and had such a happy week. We both made up our minds that the bill would be filed without the slightest delay, and talked of our marriage and our plans as if everything was settled. One thing we didn't do, fortunately—we didn't give out our engagement. I believe the first night I spoke to Mary she told her cousin, from whom she had no secrets, that I had proposed and that she had accepted me. That cousin was this very Lady Rose O'Shea now at F——. She was at the ball, of course, but I can't remember her—indeed what could I remember of that night except one person and one thing? But when Mary found out about the previous marriage, she would tell no one, and wouldn't hear of her father being spoken

to, and even refused to answer her cousin's questions about the affair. As she said, 'It would never do till the bill was filed.'

"Of course people suspected and talked, but that didn't matter; no one interfered with us, and we met every day. I could hardly persuade myself to go away to town on the business—it was so delightful down there—it was about the only real happiness I ever had; but at last Mary urged me to it, saying it was only a little temporary separation, a little momentary grief, to bring about our complete happiness—and at last I went. I saw the lawyer as soon as I arrived in town. He pricked up his ears when I told him it was a matrimonial case; and when I told him I had plenty of money, and didn't care what I spent on the matter, provided it was done quickly and effectually, he became quite affectionate. Then I stated the whole case to him. When I had finished, he stroked his chin and said,

‘It appears to me that you have no actual evidence in support of a divorce after all.’ ‘I don’t want a divorce,’ I said—‘I don’t require one; I’m going to annul the marriage altogether.’ ‘As how?’ he asked. ‘Why,’ I said, ‘I’m going to file a bill, of course; the thing’s as plain as a pike-staff.’ He was rather a grave man, but he laughed and coughed a good deal; and when I asked him how much the bill would stand me in, he laughed and coughed more, and begged my pardon. Then I had to tell him about Tommy Carleton’s brother and his opinion, whereupon he said ‘that Mr Carleton was evidently an impudent pretender or a practical joker. ‘It was impossible to prove the marriage void—that was a certainty,’ he said; ‘but, judging from the style of the woman, it might probably be easy to obtain evidence that would render a dissolution practicable. Where was the woman now?’ I told him I didn’t know.

She was in India the last time I heard of her, but my agents in the country remitted £250 half-yearly to a London firm on her account, and her whereabouts was therefore discoverable. The lawyer said I had strangely neglected my interests. In the first place, she might be dead, and some dishonest relative might be personating her, and drawing her annuity; in the second place, if I wanted to get rid of her, it was clearly expedient that a surveillance should be established to note the manner of life she was leading. If I would give him the address of her agent in London, he would get things in train; and if the woman was still in India, he would set a sharp correspondent on her track—a man who would ferret out anything; while, if she were in Europe, he would easily put her under a vigilant observation. All steps of the sort were taken: it transpired that she had been leading a roving restless life—at first in

India, then at different places in Europe—sometimes taking a theatrical engagement; that she was still given to excessive drinking and to gambling; but she baffled all efforts to obtain the kind of evidence required for my release. There the matter stands at present. The verdict of the lawyer was a terrible blow to Mary, as it was to me. I wrote and told her about it—how the bill could never be filed; but added that there was no reason to despair, as the lawyers were hard at work, had got an idea, and were sanguine that eventually something could be done to release me; at the same time, she must consider herself free from any kind of engagement, more particularly as it appeared to me that we could neither meet nor correspond under existing circumstances. She wrote me back such a jolly letter, saying that, whatever happened, she would always love me the same, and never marry any other fellow, though of

course she agreed with me that we could neither correspond nor meet unless some favourable change in circumstances took place, for which she would always pray.

“I’ve never seen her or heard from her since ; and though I know she’s as true and constant as a rock, still, Donald, a fellow has his low fits when everything looks black ; and for some time past I’ve been tremendously down on my luck—all from never hearing anything the least cheering, and having no communication with her ; so that at last I began to persuade myself she had forgotten me altogether ; and it was only when I heard she was wearing my locket that I felt, ‘Perhaps it isn’t all over with me yet!’ There, Donald, that’s my yarn—the confession of Adolphus Burridge. I imagine you’re a sharp fellow. They say Scotchmen are clear-headed. Perhaps you may hit on a scheme. So keep thinking it over, like a good fellow, will you ?”

I duly promised ; and as the day was now getting on, we remounted and rode back to camp, Burrige much relieved by his confession, and I deeply meditating on the strange tale I had heard.

CHAPTER XI.

“ We vow to weep seas, live in fire, eat rocks, tame tigers ; thinking it harder for our mistress to devise imposition enough, than for us to undergo any difficulty imposed.”—*Troilus and Cressida*.

For some time past, as I have said, my visits to the Hermitage had been almost daily ; certainly two days never elapsed without seeing me on my way to the shrine of my worship.

A common taste and a common interest are grand allies of the tender passion—in-deed, without one or other, it is difficult to see how affairs of the heart can progress ; and when such tastes and interests are sincerely attached to objects which, like the fine arts, appeal principally to the imagina-

tion and the heart, the force of the alliance can scarcely be over-estimated.

Identity of feeling in such matters is something more than a coincidence of convictions in other things—it is a genuine sympathy, begetting and disclosing other sympathies. Thus hearts that are tending towards each other have, with that common assistance, such safe and tentative methods of mutual approach, that an almost perfectly unconscious harmony may be established between them, and their relations may be said to be definitively settled before the thought of either has found vent in speech—speech that comes, at last, sudden, ungainly, and incoherent, like the startled exclamations of those who encounter in the dark.

Lady Rose and I had at least one taste in common—a taste that was more than a taste, amounting, in my case at least, to a passion—and that was music; music, than which there is no more subtle minister of love, sup-

plying to the lover an endless store of allegory and parable, wherein to wrap, as in a light and only half-concealing drapery, the supplicating form of his passion. I was unconscious of the part music was playing in the history of mine, unconscious that it was revealing her to me and interpreting me to her—conscious only that it yielded an increased delight, and was blended by a thousand associations with the idea of my divinity. Yet not the less was it lending to the Parcæ golden threads to weave the woof of our destiny withal.

But music was not the means of a merely inward, invisible, metaphysical *rapprochement* between us; it was also the basis, the ostensible ground, of much of our outward, and visible communion.

I admired a song of hers perhaps. Probably it would suit a tenor; probably it would suit me. She would copy it for me; she would teach it to me. I was not a quick

pupil, and the song would require many rehearsals. Then came duets. At first she did not encourage the idea of performances in common; but as it became an object of constant solicitation and feverish desire on my part, she assented; and these were supreme moments for me, when my voice was mingled with hers in interpreting those inner mysteries of pathos which no human words—which music only—can rehearse.

But what were Lady Rose's feelings all this time? Ah! there was the question. But here again my want of culture in the art of love left me at fault; and as I began to speculate, after a time, what might come of this overmastering passion of mine, I could only wander about in a maze of conjectures, at the guidance of random hopes and fears. Lady Rose was kind to me—she was gracious to me; glad to see me when I came—and when I stayed away, noticed it with surprise, and, I even thought, with

regret. She liked my songs—she sang my favourites of her own accord ; and if I ventured to admire a particular dress or ornament, or to praise this or that colour, I rather fancied that they did not from that circumstance lose in her regard. So, too, in the matter of flowers and books and many other subjects. But with all this, through all, even her deeper feelings, there seemed to run a vein of light irony and playful banter which would suddenly divert her from subjects of high interest. Malapropos (as it seemed to me) perceptions of the incongruous and the ludicrous were for ever interrupting the course of conversations that were becoming critical ; and I was often driven to the despairing conviction either that, with all her charming endowments, no grave impression could resist this spirit of mockery, or that *I* was being experimented upon, played with and tortured to gratify partly her womanly vanity, partly the quaint

and humorous vein in which she chose to regard things in general. But then a man "in love" is undeniably a ludicrous object (*kismet*—it is written in his forehead). He is generally conscious of it himself, I should think, and may even be to himself at times the subject of a grimly humorous contemplation. Was it possible that Lady Rose was ignorant of my condition? No; it was impossible; and was she, though accepting the adoration, likely to miss the absurdities that cling fatally to all such devotees? Certainly not. She might love me then, although my incongruities as a lover might amuse her? Perhaps. Well, that was to say that she might love and laugh at me at one and the same time, which was absurd. Love is devotion; in laughter of this sort there is contempt—and who ever heard of a contemptuous devotion? With these and suchlike speculations I began to torment myself unceasingly, the only conclusion I

ever arrived at being that I was more and more hopelessly in love, and that without Rose life would be insupportable.

A short time before Burr ridge's confession, it had transpired at the Hermitage that his regiment had arrived at the camp. He was forthwith invited to dinner, but declined on the score of health.

I was cross-examined by Badger in open court about him, and as to whether I had made his acquaintance. I admitted that I had, that I knew him, that I was even intimate with him; finally, that I liked him, and thought him a good fellow. After this Miss Richmond was much more visible to me than she had been before, and much more inclined to be intimate and friendly. Lady Rose, on the contrary, seemed every now and then to remind herself that she had an occasion against me, and whenever Burr ridge became the subject of conversation, would treat me for some

time with marked coldness. There was no mystery for once about this—indeed there was no mystery to me at all now. She looked on Burrige as a heartless scoundrel, and resented the idea of his being treated as an intimate and a good fellow by any one whom she honoured with her acquaintance.

The day after Burrige had confided to me his story, I was detained in camp by duty, and it was not till the following afternoon that I was able to visit the Hermitage. Nearly three days without seeing Rose—an unparalleled event! I had found growing about the trees under which Burrige and I had rested a pretty fern, of a species which Lady Rose (who was a connoisseur and collector) did not possess. I brought it home with me, and took it over this afternoon to present.

I found her alone in the garden. “Where have you been, Sir Truant?” she said. “All

my pains and all my good temper have been wasted on you, for in three days you must have forgotten that passage in the new song about which you really were stupidity personified."

"Affairs of state and cares of office, Lady Rose," I said, "and the urgent call of friendship, have made me a very unwilling truant; but look! I have brought a peace-offering; here is an olive-branch in the shape of a new fern. I have not neglected my botany, at all events, you see."

"Oh! it is beautiful," she cried; "I am so much obliged. I had no idea this fern was to be found in this part of the country. Where did you find it?"

"I know a bank whereon this wild fern grows,
Close to the highroad which to Tongham goes,
Quite over-canopied with oak-trees fine;
I lay from luncheon till the hour to dine—
All Tuesday lay there, and on leaving brought
This tribute to an ever-present thought!"

I delivered this as if I had improvised it,

although, in fact, it had been excogitated with some trouble on the ride from camp.

“Dear me!” cried Lady Rose, “you must certainly have been visited by some of the Muses when you were asleep, like—like who was it? But were you alone and asleep really and truly like a boy staying away from school out of pure idleness? For shame! I didn’t expect it of you!”

“No, Lady Rose, I wasn’t staying away out of idleness—I stayed away to my regret, I assure you—much to my discontent. I spent a wretched day, and my feelings all yesterday were not enviable, that you may——”

“Good heavens!” she exclaimed, “I hope you hadn’t been killing any one, and burying him under the trees. Stay, let me see; is this really a fern and not a mandrake? No, no” (as I was going to interrupt her), “don’t tell me about it. I might be taken up as an accomplice, you know.”

"I was neither asleep, nor alone, nor killing any one, nor helping any one to kill and bury any one else; yet I had an interesting day, though, as I say, I regretted not being here."

"No tragedy after all! you were surveying, or skirmishing, or some stupid thing of that sort, I suppose?"

"Nothing of the sort; I was having a long *tête-à-tête* with a friend."

"And he bored you?"

"No; he didn't bore me at all; he interested me deeply."

"I should like to see him, as a natural curiosity. A person who can carry on a *tête-à-tête* interview from luncheon to dinner without becoming a bore, is a person I should like to see."

"I rather think you would not care to see the person in question."

"Why! who was he?"

"He was no other than the person to

whom I am eternally indebted for having been, though involuntarily, the cause of my acquaintance with you."

"You mean—you mean——?"

"I mean Captain Burridge."

"Oh!" said Lady Rose; but there was a world of meaning concentrated in the monosyllable; by it Burridge was scourged and executed, and I was sent to Coventry.

"You are prejudiced against him, Lady Rose, I am well aware."

"No, Captain Bruce, *prejudice* is not the word. I have formed a *judgment* in the matter, and it is against him certainly."

"But I don't see—pardon me for saying so—how a judgment can be arrived at without hearing both sides."

"I don't pretend to be a lawyer, but I believe there is such a thing as judgment going by default; and it strikes me that this is clearly a case where it may do so justly."

"No, Lady Rose, I assure you it is not so. As a man, my friend is honourable and upright—and as a lover, constant and true as steel; but he has been the victim of cruel misfortunes and vile machinations. You yourself would be the first to do him justice if you knew his story."

"What is his story?"

"Pardon me, that is not his secret alone; it is Miss Richmond's."

"Do you mean to tell me that my cousin is satisfied this Captain Burridge is the paragon you represent him to be; that she does not consider herself aggrieved, outraged, insulted, by his neglect?"

"It is so indeed."

"I cannot comprehend this. You assert that there is a mutual understanding and an affection still subsisting between them?"

"I do."

"Then why this misery, this separation, this intolerable mystery?"

“Pardon me, Lady Rose; *that* is the secret. That there is a barrier I do not, of course, deny. I will take it upon me, however, to say that I am quite sure your cousin would be much benefited by taking you into her confidence. You might tell her you are led to understand that Captain Burridge is not to blame, as you had believed, but that a secret reason justifies the cessation of his correspondence, and then advise her to relieve her distress by confiding the mystery to you.”

“Is this barrier of a sort that might be removed by the counsels and good offices of friends?”

“There is no reconciliation necessary; they are at one. It is a question of great delicacy. I think it possible that the assistance of friends *might* be of use. I can assure you that no exertions on my part shall be spared to assist in clearing away their difficulties.”

“Oh! Captain Bruce, if you did that—if you made my cousin happy again—I don’t know how I could ever show my gratitude to you sufficiently. I am sure you are wise and prudent and clever, and if you only take it in hand you will succeed; and you will take it in hand, will you not?”

“I am sorry that it is not a more distasteful undertaking.”

“Why?”

“That I might show you, Lady Rose—that I might show you that your slightest wish is a law to me—that whatever it directed, however arduous and painful, it would become my deepest delight to execute; and” (I added, entirely forgetting, in my enthusiasm, the nature of the service that could alone help the lovers) “I will do anything—I will go through fire and water to serve you—I mean them.”

“Thank you; you are kind, but I retract what I said about your wisdom; I think

you are an excessively foolish and hare-brained person, and I must give you another geranium if you do not try to improve."

Here was the east wind set in at once.

"Oh, if I could but receive *another* flower!" I sighed, in a rather lackadaisical manner I fear.

"Another flower? and so you shall. I will make interest with my uncle, and tease him to give you another of his sacred peonies."

"When a knight-errant went forth to perform a deed of arms at the request of his lady, did she not use to fortify him with some token, some badge of her, to animate him in the contest?"

"*Après?*"

"Well, then—that is—yes—I mean—give me your badge, your token, that I may wear it; give me a rose."

"Knights-errant wore their badges in their helmets, did they not? Now I am

sure a peony would look much better in your shako ; how the General would admire it ! Just reflect ! ”

“ Ah ! Lady Rose, will you never be serious ? You are too cruel. The rose would be a priceless boon to me.”

“ Sir knight, I incline to think you are cunning, as it becomes a Celt to be ; but I too am cunning. You shall earn this flower. If I gave it you now you would, according to your own statement, have got all you wanted—you would have no inducement to persevere ; therefore you shall earn it. Come back safe and victorious out of the fire and out of the water, and you shall have it.”

“ And how shall I then interpret it ? ” I asked, in a voice meant to be full of the tenderest meaning.

“ Captain Bruce, I am not a diviner, nor a prophetess, nor a witch. I can neither look forward into the future nor peer into the depths of your mysterious mind. You

had better go to town and consult the new clairvoyante. *En attendant*, here, to encourage you, is something that means 'perseverance'—it is nearly as grand as a peony;" and she gave me a blossom of magnolia.

I pressed it to my lips, and was gasping and gobbling in abortive attempts to say something critical, when she broke up the *tête-à-tête* by moving towards the house, saying, "That concludes our lesson in botany for to-day. I am very much pleased with your progress; your discovery of the fern is really a most hopeful sign."

I was at the Hermitage again next day, and Lady Rose opened the subject of the BurrIDGE controversy.

"I have taken your advice, Captain Bruce," she said. "I have spoken to my cousin; she has told me the story."

"It is a strange one, is it not? and you now look on Captain BurrIDGE in a different light?"

“Certainly it is a strange story, and certainly I do look upon Captain Burrige in a different light; but do not imagine that I have exalted him into a hero of romance.”

“I did not expect that; I thought you would be touched by his misfortunes; I thought that the generosity which led him to his first false step would intercede with you when you came to judge of his error with regard to your cousin.”

“One cannot help pitying his hard lot, of course; but it would be odd morality, would it not, to say of an unfortunate criminal, ‘Poor fellow! he has had desperate sorrows and trials, and if he has committed a murder or two we must stretch a point for him; for this wretch on whom Fate has been so hard, and who has shown that he has some human feeling——’”

“That is rather an extreme view.”

“It is quite a fair one. I want to show you that I recognise no excuse for Captain

Burridge's conduct to my cousin, however I may pity him ; no excuse but one that is not flattering, and that is, his own miserable weakness. If I admit that he is upright and honourable, as you say, I can only do so with the qualifications which complete Thackeray's definition of the Heavy Dragoon."

"You are very severe. Consider the strong temptation, the violent excitement which hurried him into a declaration, and that he would at once have recalled it, but for what happened."

"Oh ! I consider all that ; but I remember that he saw her frequently before the night of his declaration—saw her frequently—fostered his own feelings and encouraged hers—in fact, deliberately took the steps which were sure to lead to the catastrophe which did happen ; but then I consider his previous career—I have had an outline of it, you know—and as he appears to have been

made a dupe of on all hands, why, I give him the benefit of the milder solution : if he is not a knave, Captain Bruce, there is but one alternative description, and, in my mercy, I select that. You are loyal to your friend. I like loyalty—it is a great quality; but you are the last man whose judgment I should expect to be warped by that or any other consideration, in a question either of principle or intelligence, and I expect you to agree with me.”

I had never seen her more in earnest, and I must confess that these delightful expressions as to myself made her small opinion of my friend much more palatable than it would otherwise have been.

“ Oh ! ” I replied, “ I don’t pretend that he is a genius, though I will not go the length of admitting your ‘ milder alternative ; ’ all I say is, that he is a right good fellow—devoted to your cousin—and that he is a man of whose affection no woman

need be ashamed. After all, great intellect on either side is not essential to a happy marriage."

"Well, perhaps you are right. I confess that weakness does not appear to me to be a fascinating quality; but everything else granted, how is the obstacle to be removed? that is the question. You dubbed yourself a knight-errant in the cause. You see some sphere for your exploits, I suppose? some fire and water to go through. You are not going to tilt hap-hazard at windmills like Don Quixote? What is your scheme?"

Now I had become conscious that, in my protestations of yesterday, I had been, in fact, talking hideous nonsense, making vows and undertakings of which I could foresee no realisation; and at this moment the exceeding unknighthliness of the service that could alone rescue Burridge—viz., the collection of unpleasant statistics as to Carlotta's present life—stood out in such ludi-

crous relief against my chivalresque phrases, that I fairly laughed out. I turned it off, however, by remarking on female curiosity, and vaguely assured her that she would see.

“Well, Captain Bruce,” she said, with great earnestness, “my cousin’s happiness is above all things dear to me. It is torture to me to witness her silent suffering, her hopeless despondency—she who was like a sunbeam wherever she came. It is torture to me to witness all this without the power to comfort or help; and if her union with Captain Burr ridge is to secure, really to bring back, true happiness to her——”

“I will answer for it; I will guarantee it,” I cried.

“I accept your guarantee; perhaps I have been hard upon your friend. You have had opportunities of judging of him, and, notwithstanding all I have said, I *respect* your judgment, I *trust* you; I *know* you would not

deceive me, and I *will* hope with all my heart and soul that your efforts will soon be triumphant. You have zeal for your friend, you have humanity to inspire you, and—and—you have my—my best wishes, if they are of any importance.”

“You cannot imagine how happy you make me by these words, and never man had such inducements to exertion as I have,” I replied, again forgetting that my exertions must be rather those of Inspector Tanner than of Sir Galahad. “I shall look forward to claiming my guerdon; I shall think of that rose——”

“Are you really so anxious for such a trifle?” she inquired, looking at me earnestly, as if surprised.

“A trifle? it is everything to me—it is life to me; and when I have won it—when I have won this *symbol*, Lady Rose, I warn you that I shall be bold in my interpretation.”

A bright blush suffused her beautiful face, and she said, falteringly, "A symbol, did I say?—did I promise that it should be a symbol?"

"You did not *promise* it, but you will not be so cruel as to take all the hope out of my life?"

Lady Rose lowered her beautiful eyes, and I was just going to begin my interpretations *d'avance*, when lo! that *pessima tigris* Mrs Badger bounced round the corner of the walk, and broke up our interview with strident cries of "Luncheon! luncheon! luncheon!" Disappointed, but not desponding, I went away that day, for in my heart I felt that this lovely prize might be mine.

CHAPTER XII.

“There are cozeners abroad ; therefore it behoves men to be wary.”—*Winter's Tale*.

PURE happiness comes only to us mortal men, if it ever comes at all, in swift electric flashes, that are gone while we are yet wondering at the phenomenon. The *conviction* of my hopes sent such an electric thrill through my heart, but ere yet its intense vibrations had pulsed themselves away, ever-watchful Care was up and doing. I had thought of my love, of wooing and winning, in an ethereal and abstract way ; to hear Lady Rose confess that my love was requited—that had been my goal, and I had looked no farther. But now that there

dawned a possibility of reaching it, Care, who never seems to abandon one method of torture till she has secured another, was ready for me. "Wooing and winning," quoth she, "are simple enough—though, by the by, the latter is no certainty for you yet—to woo and to win are matters of everyday occurrence; but you know it is proverbially rare to wed the object of your first love. How are you to marry? What is your income? You wince, but that is the main question after all. Sordid? of course it is; what isn't, pray? Can you pay rent and taxes, wages, weekly bills, monthly bills, yearly bills, for an establishment such as you can ask a lady to share? What is your income? Consider. Out with it!" It unfortunately called for no deep financial calculation to arrive at the sum in question. The pay of a captain, a heavily-mulcted £200 a-year, and £300 a-year of my own in the Funds—it was a case of very simple

addition; and this was all I had, and all I could ever calculate upon as a certainty. That was bad; it was desperately bad.

The failure of the “three-hundred-a-year marriages,” so much talked of once, has no doubt been painfully demonstrated long ago. It is perhaps to the mortal writhings of some of the poor birds who were taken captive by that specious lure that all the commotion in the provision market is due, that the face of the public is sharpened against that *draco reluctans* the West-end tradesman, and that all the world co-operates and becomes its own grocer. The three-hundred-a-year fallacy, or any fallacy in any way approximating to it, I was in no danger of falling into. I had plumbed the capabilities of £500 a-year. I knew that income was barely sufficient for my own somewhat frugal wants—how, then, was it to do for two, even with grievous sacrifices on both sides? “I think you can scarcely miss the

absurdity of the idea," remarked Care, as she plumped down with a heavy thud upon my soul.

"Dolly, old boy," I said that night to my double, who was as usual lounging in my hut, "I am infernally miserable!"

"So am I," replied Dolly, stolidly.

"That of course I take for granted—there's no novelty in that, and it doesn't remedy my case, which is novel."

"What's the row, eh? Badger cut up rough? or is it duns or what?"

"Nothing of the sort—I begin to think Lady Rose likes me, Dolly."

"Oh! that makes you miserable, does it? You're just like Dick Footrup; he was always spooning after some one—always desperately in love till he had managed to make the girl care for him, and then he was sick of it at once, and anxious to be off. 'A fellow can't hunt a dead fox,' he used to say; he was nailed at last, though, by an

American widow—very yellow and hideous—and I think it served him right; but I thought you were a different sort altogether.”

“So I am, Dolly, I hope; that isn’t my case at all. I’ve only just begun to think it possible that Lady Rose might accept me; and if she does, why, what am I to do?”

“Do! Write to her father, then to your lawyer, then to your tailor—nothing simpler.”

“But, my good fellow, I’m awfully hard up.”

“Sell your horses then; by the by, you haven’t got any except little Cross. Well, then, draw on me—how much do you want to tide it over?”

“It’s not an affair of tiding over, my good fellow; I want enough to tide over the whole of our lives,—enough to keep up a respectable establishment and support a family.”

Dolly's eyes opened very wide. "I don't quite understand," he said (and it is odd how hardly some men can understand difficulties, particularly of finance, which they haven't experienced)—"I don't quite understand; but why not do lots of post-obits?"

"Post-obits?"

"Yes, I never did myself, because I was never really hard up; but lots of our fellows do, and it seems to answer; they live like fighting-cocks: yes, Donald, post-obits are your game, you may depend upon it;" and he gave the opinion with the gravity of a Chancellor of the Exchequer recommending an extra penny to the income-tax.

I had to explain to him the theory of post-obits, and that I had but £500 a-year and no expectations of any disposable value.

"I thought you had a rich aunt," he said, after ruminating.

"So I have, but what of that?"

“Draw her, of course.”

“Easier said than done. I’m not necessarily her heir, and I don’t fancy sponging on the old lady while she’s alive.

“But if you can’t be sure of being her heir, you can’t be sure of sponging on her after she’s dead.”

“Well, then?”

“Well, then, you might never sponge on her at all!” And he said this as if, by some law of nature, every created aunt must either in life or after death be subjected to a sponging process. “I think it’s all confounded nonsense and pride,” he went on, with more than usual animation. “What has the old woman got to do with her money? If the marriage doesn’t come off, there may be a breaking of hearts. I suppose the old lady wouldn’t like that? She’s not an ogress, is she? Now if she offered you a settlement, do you mean to tell me you would refuse it?”

"I don't say that, but that's different from asking her."

"Still it would be sponging, as you call it, all the same; so it's only a false pride about asking that stands in your way."

"Perhaps you're right; but if I did ask, I have no reason to be certain that I should get anything."

"Try, old boy — try; it's your only chance, as far as I can see; and you must have *something* to offer when you propose to the father, you know. In my opinion the aunt must undoubtedly be devoured."

"I will think it over," I said.

Burridge had certainly given me a ray of light. My aunt was good-natured in the highest degree, liked me immensely, was very rich; and I could not but feel certain, from her little weakness already alluded to, that a niece with a title would be an irresistible inducement to her (if she required one) to be generous. But my friend was right:

it was the asking, I fear, not the receiving, that was distasteful.

“I’ve been thinking,” Burridge went on — “I’ve been thinking that I should go up to town and see these lawyers again about my affair.”

“Certainly,” said I, “and I should like much to go with you. I wish to hear their views and set my brains regularly to work about it. I’ll go with you any day—why not to-morrow?”

“All right—there can’t be a field-day—let it be to-morrow. You can call and see your aunt, too, and sound her; and if you think I can be of any use I might drop in to look for you, eh?”

“Thanks, old fellow; we’ll settle that to-morrow.”

The next morning we accordingly went to town, and drove first to the office of the lawyers, Messrs Frowster, Drencher, & Trapp.

Sir Galahad was in the saddle at last. We were received by the senior partner, Mr Frowster, a sedate, stork-like; spectacled man — utterly bald, except on a ridge at the extreme back of his head, suggesting the idea that a gale of wind had been suddenly arrested there in the act of barking him. His manner was dry, his voice rusty, his words precise and carefully chosen; so many of them went to the six-and-eight-pence, probably, and he respected them accordingly.

“Good morning, Mr Frowster!” cried Burridge, cheerily, as he plunged into the room.

“Morning, sir,” said Frowster, looking mistily at him through his spectacles. “Be seated—business?”

“Oh! the old business, of course; how is it wagging, eh?”

“Ahem! you refer to——?”

"To the business about my wife—that shouldn't-be."

"I remember now: this gentleman is your brother, of course?"

"No, my friend Captain Bruce."

"Confidential?"

"Close as wax."

A pause. "How is it wagging?" continued Dolly.

"I must ask you to explain," said the lawyer, upon whose business ear Burrigge's jaunty tone seemed to jar.

"Any news of the woman?"

"Well, no—not in one sense."

"Which of the senses do you mean?"

"You are aware she had been lost sight of for a time?"

"Yes."

"She has, however, written from Paris for a remittance within the last week."

"Thought she would—the cormorant! Is any one looking after her there?"

"We have lost no time ; Lapin has been instructed—she could scarcely be in better hands ; but we have as yet no intelligence at all serviceable."

"Hang it !" groaned Dolly. "I don't believe you fellows are half sharp. I don't believe I'll ever get quit of her : what a heartbreaking thing it is ! I wonder if she would take ten thousand pounds to commit suicide ; do you think she would, Frowster, eh ?"

"I must beg of you to recollect yourself, sir," said Mr Frowster, with awful dignity.

"I'll tell you what," cried Burridge, quite unpenetrated by the lawyer's wrath, "I want you two fellows to knock your long heads together and see if you can hit off anything."

Looking at Mr Frowster's denuded skull, which was supplied with a formidable array of knots and knobs, I could not help think-

ing that it would be a most uncomfortable object to be in collision with. On that gentleman's mind the metaphor produced a different effect; he glared at Adolphus and half rose, then commanding himself said, with calm severity,—

“If you imply (for I confess your language is somewhat incomprehensible) — if you imply a wish that I should commune with your friend, I will make two observations,—first, that I should imagine you had had enough of extra - professional advice; and second, that our firm confers only with principals or their agents.”

“All right, there's no difficulty; I'll make you my agent, Donald. Now, then, fire away, Frowster; you can have no objection now. What salary are you to have, Donald?” and he laughed.

“Captain Burridge,” gasped the lawyer. “Sir—Captain Burridge, I must take the liberty of making two remarks,—first, that

your tone is grossly unbusiness-like; and second, that it is not what our firm expects or is accustomed to—it hurts its professional feeling.”

“I’m very sorry,” said BurrIDGE; “I didn’t mean to hurt its feelings—I beg its pardon; but why not have a palaver with Bruce?”

Here I interposed with my suavest manner. “I am quite aware of your professional etiquette, Mr Frowster—I would be the last to offend against it; but as Captain BurrIDGE and I are constantly together, and on the most confidential footing, and as he is not much acquainted with business, I believe it would be well that I should understand the case in its legal aspect. I could advise him in his correspondence with you, and so on; and I am sure he will not object if I ask you kindly to look on me, for the moment, as the principal; and perhaps, Adolphus, if you were to leave us to

ourselves for a few minutes we might get on quicker."

"With all my heart—my name is Easy," cried Adolphus, jumping up; and the lawyer made no objection. "And mind you, Frowster, you must listen well to what Bruce says: he's a fellow to give you a wrinkle; I'll back him against twenty professionals; keep your back straight and your ears open;" with which parting shot he was off.

Mr Frowster breathed short and hard, and stared at me through his dim spectacles; the firm's feelings were so completely paralysed that its mouthpiece was for a moment without power of speech. "Your friend," he said at last, "permits himself a latitude of speech to which we are utterly unused. I am a good-natured man myself, but the firm cannot tolerate such things. It does not permit slang in business matters. Other houses may have

different systems, but with this firm business is a sacred thing; a jest insults it, slang outrages it."

"I am sure," I said, "Captain Burridge has not the slightest wish to offend; but he is a little peculiar and ignorant of the world, which you, as a man of the world, will forgive; and now, not to waste your valuable time, may I ask if there is no hope of proving this marriage void?"

"We have no doubt that the marriage is a sound one."

"What is to be done then?"

"We can only trust to the acuteness of Monsieur Lapin and our other correspondents; but I am bound, with regard to the lady, to make three remarks—first, she is very wary; second, she is no longer young; third, without her assistance we can do nothing;" and he gave a little rusty laugh—the firm was permitting itself a pleasantry.

“Can I be of no use then?” I said desperately, remembering my vow.

“None, sir; but you may do much harm by indiscreet zeal.”

“It looks like a dead lock.”

“It suggests the idea, certainly.”

“Is there *no* device then?”

“Yes, sir, there is a device—a common device—a powerful device—but a dangerous and an expensive one.”

“And that is?”

“If I mention it take note of two things—first, I speak not as the firm; second, not as a lawyer, but simply as James Frowster, gentleman.”

“Certainly.”

“Other houses work with it as a common instrument, but we are particular—very.”

“What is it?”

He dropped his voice and craned his long neck across the table.

“To arrange pecuniarily with the female

party—not to put too fine a point on it—to purchase her collusion. What do you think of it?” and he peered at me curiously through his spectacles.

“Think of it, sir?” I cried. “I think it would be infamous.”

“Infamous is a strong word—actionable. We should never use actionable expressions; the device has been resorted to by persons of respectability, I believe, but it is foreign to the practice of Frowster, Drencher, & Trapp. If it was mooted to that firm, sir, *as a firm*, it would be repelled, I feel certain, with heat. Pray do not suggest it to your friend; he is ash; he might not be able to resist so certain a solution. It would cost him,” he said, musingly—“let me see—not less than twelve thousand pounds—an immense sum; he would, of course, revoke the annuity of five hundred a-year—and, I think—three and two are five, and one six, and three nine, and three twelve;” he appeared to be check-

ing off the different items of which the grand total was to be composed ; “ yes, I think it could certainly be arranged for twelve thousand—an awful sum, sir—but he is rich and eager and reckless ” (he kept looking at me over his spectacles), “ and might be glad to purchase happiness even at that figure. On the whole, I would not suggest it to him. If he came to this firm, *as a firm*, I incline to think he might be repelled with heat ; they might even decline farther relations ; that would depend. The danger of suggesting it to him (*our* danger, that is) would be that he might *privately* arrange the collusion and then come to this firm, who, all unwitting of the *mala fides*, might give him the benefit of their vast experience in matrimonial causes. The firm could not be responsible for that. But if they discovered it after, it might probably produce a painful impression on them. I think perhaps it would be prudent to abandon your idea of suggesting

it to him ;” and he gave me one of his queer looks.

“Thank you for imputing it to me. I never dreamt of such a vile idea, and I am sure Captain Burridge would recoil from it, as I do—being a gentleman.”

“I am confident reflection would correct his first thought, as it has convinced you,” said Mr Frowster, with much dejection in his voice. “There is nothing like honour. It is the watchword of this firm. I think we can say no more ?”

“I think not. Good morning.”

I found Burridge at the door. “Well,” he cried, “have you settled anything ?”

“Nothing as yet ; we must have patience. I’m not much taken with your legal adviser, Adolphus.”

“No more am I ; he’s a horrid old prig.”

“Who recommended him to you ?”

“Oh ! he used to do all the post-obit business for the regiment, but they’ve cut

him now for sending a writ to one of the fellows."

"I think we had better put your case into other hands;" for it struck me this intensely sensitive firm might easily get a free command of money from Adolphus, start the collusion scheme on their own account without his authority, and fatally compromise him. He was evidently one of those fellows born to be the football of fate, every new kick sending him into the clutches of some new and yet more rascally operator. So we agreed to transfer the business to the hands of my own lawyer, for whom I could vouch.

CHAPTER XIII.

“For suddenly a grievous sickness took him,
That makes him gasp and stare and catch the air.”

—*Henry VI.*

“I know my physic will work with him.”

—*Twelfth Night.*

“It’s time for luncheon now,” said Burridge, as we left the lawyers’; “let’s go to the Rag and feed there.”

“I was thinking about my aunt,” I replied; “not that I can do any good about what we were talking of last night—I never could muster enough of brass for that; but I ought to go and see her, I think.”

“Let me go with you,” said Adolphus; “I would like to see your aunt; I’m rather a connoisseur in old ladies. She’ll give us a good luncheon likely, and there’s no saying

what may happen. I'm hungry and will eat freely—you shall be gloomy and refuse everything; if you're hungry, so much the better, it will make you pale; then you must sigh a good deal, and drink an immense lot of cold water; then break a few things,—not expensive things—that might disgust her—perhaps groan a little and mutter something about your poor head. See? eh? That will fetch your aunt, or she is unworthy of the name. She'll say, 'What's the matter, Donald? It distresses me to see you in this state. Confide in me. What is it?' and you'll say, in a faint voice, 'Nothing, aunt—nothing; don't distress yourself about me; we all have our little troubles:' and then try to look jolly for a moment, and talk about the opera, and then get worse and groan again, and break something more. Then your aunt is sure to write for an explanation, and you'll have it all out with her. She'll settle a fortune on

you ; you'll marry Lady Rose, and — and live happy ever after. Now what do you think of that ? ”

“ A splendid programme,” said I, laughing, “ except the fasting ; I'm as hungry as a hunter, and never could resist the luncheon.”

“ Well, then,” cried he, earnestly, “ come to a pastry-cook's first, and eat a lot of jam-tarts and stuff ; perhaps they'll make you a little ill—so much the better : come on.”

“ Nonsense, my good fellow ; I'll be guided by circumstances ; ” so we hailed a hansom and drove to my aunt's.

“ She was at home and just going to luncheon,” the butler said.

“ Now mind your cue,” whispered Burridge, as we ascended the stairs ; “ a worn smile as you enter, and try to totter a little in your walk.”

The last remark was unfortunate, as it sent me into the drawing-room with a broad

grin on my face. The weather was intensely hot, and my aunt was, as I have said, corpulent, — “a rosy aunt of purple cheer.” Wallowing in an easy-chair at an open window, fanning and panting, we found the good lady. She looked the impersonation of good-nature in distress, like the hippopotamus in the dog-days, or a plethoric captain of volunteers at a midsummer field-day.

“Donald at last!” she cried, her face radiant at once; “I thought you had forgotten me altogether.”

“Here I am at last, aunt; I’ve not been to see you for an age, but to make up for it, I’ve not only come myself, but brought my double; so this ought to count for two visits. Let me introduce my particular friend, Captain Burridge.”

“I’m delighted to see you both; but, dear me! it’s very odd—isn’t it? very striking, I mean—is it noticed? —the likeness between you?”

“Noticed, my dear aunt! It has been a source of great confusion and endless mistakes; and as to its being noticed, it’s been alluded to in the ‘Times,’ and ‘Punch’ has been on it two or three times,” said I, as usual irresistibly provoked by my aunt’s power of wondering to minister to her taste in that direction.

Burridge, taking, as he thought, his cue from me, ventured to remark, looking guilty, “It was mentioned in the House the other day.”

“Indeed!” cried my aunt. “How was that?”

“Oh! quite incidentally,” said I, distrusting Burridge’s powers in this line of art; “but it shows you how notorious the thing is. I believe the Queen wishes to have us photographed as the Corsican Brothers. For my part, I hate such publicity.”

“Why?” cried aunt Blogg; “I think it’s

delightful : it makes you the fashion—everybody knows about you.”

“Oh, we’ve had enough of that, Adolphus ! haven’t we ? One soon tires of being a lion.”

“It *is* so *very* odd I haven’t heard of this before,” said my aunt ; “yet I was at the Mansion House ball t’other night, and had a long talk with Lady St Ubbs, who is *quite* in the *beau monde*. and she never mentioned it.”

“*Is* Lady St Ubbs in society ?” I inquired, superciliously. “*I* never met her—did you, Dolly ?”

“I can’t say I ever did ; but then I’m not much about, you know.”

“No ; but wherever you *do* go is always in the first flight” (a piece of intelligence which seemed to surprise my friend a good deal), “and either you or I must have met her if *she* had the *entrée*. I’m afraid, aunt,

Lady St Ubbs is not in our set;" and I spoke as if, with every wish to make the best case for my aunt's friend, my conscience compelled me to bring in this dam-natory verdict against her ladyship.

"Dear me!" said the innocent old lady, with unconscious satire, "she talks as much about fine people as you do, and seems to know them."

"Ah, aunt! we mustn't believe every-thing everybody says; for my part, the more I hear a man talk about swells, unless he is notoriously one himself" (and I implied by my manner that this was my predicament), "the less I believe him to know about them."

"Oh Donald! bless me, I quite forgot!—talking of grandees, have you seen any more of that beautiful bewitching Lady ——?"

"Excuse me, aunt, the subject is unpleasant to me; and talking of lions, they

have appetites you know, at feeding-time. Are you going to give us any luncheon ?”

“To be sure, my dear ; it was announced before you came in : let us go down.”

“The likeness is very great, I must say,” said my aunt, when we were seated at luncheon ; “but you’ll forgive an aunt for saying, Captain Burrige, that it’s not a compliment to Donald.”

Now why should a thoroughly good-natured person, if ever so much an aunt, say a thing like this ? it can please nobody, and is most likely to give mortal offence to somebody ; yet nothing is commoner with ladies of a certain age and class than remarks of the sort in favour of their own kith and kin. Why ?

Burrige was insensible about his personal appearance, and it fell harmless upon him. “I’m quite aware, ma’am” (he would call my aunt “ma’am”), “that it’s a great compliment to me ; but just at present I

feel I have a better chance with Donald than usual."

"How do you mean?"

"I mean that, looking so haggard and ill and miserable as he is doing, of course his beauty suffers," replied Burridge, who, having vainly endeavoured by telegraph to dissuade me from any active participation in the meal, was now cutting out a line for himself.

"Ill and haggard!" cried my aunt, "I vow I don't see it; he's looking as rosy and well as I ever saw him; I don't think I remember him with such a colour."

Nor is it likely she should; he who has soldiered a hot summer at Aldershot, and has been exposed to the daily dust and sun of that awful Campus Martius—the Long Valley—may remember what his complexion was. To me the sun had been very unmerciful: my nose, which was of a prominent boldness, had been transformed by

its action to the semblance of a red-hot poker; and for the rest of my face, there was only one streak of white in it across the upper forehead, marking the line of the forage-cap. You seldom see a more complete picture of health than an Aldershot man in summer, and I was an exaggerated specimen of the type.

“As to his colour, ma’am,” cried Dolly, “that’s hectic.”

“Hectic! what, his nose too?”

“Hectic, ma’am, decidedly,” insisted Dolly, gravely. “The doctor said so last night to me when we were consulting about his symptoms; ‘he’s as hectic as the —— as possible, nose and all,’ were the doctor’s very words. Don’t interrupt me, Donald: we’re all very uneasy about him down there, ma’am; he conceals his symptoms, but he can’t deceive us: there’s something far wrong, frightful blue dev—, I beg your pardon, ma’am—great depression—mutter-

ings—want of sleep—want of appetite—he's eaten nothing but ship's biscuit and cold tea for a fortnight—and—and a baked potato, at the colonel's urgent request, last Sunday. Yes, you're right, ma'am, he *is* eating now" (for I was performing prodigies with a cold pie, and my aunt remarked it), "but it's a false appetite: don't give way to it, my dear fellow—think of the reaction; the colonel says it's the lungs, the regiment thinks it's the liver, I say it's the heart, the doctor says it's all three, induced by anxiety and distress. Pray speak seriously to him—exert your authority, ma'am, for he neglects *our* advice." And BurrIDGE concluded his lengthy and spirited effort by a profusion of furtive winks at me. My poor aunt looked fairly puzzled. On one side sat the mendacious dragoon slowly uttering his dismal report; on the other sat I—the patient—hale and hearty, stout and rubicund, eating as it became a lion.

"What does this mean, Donald?" faltered the good lady. "What is the matter?"

"Oh! nothing, aunt; only a delusion of Burridge's—a joke of his;" for I could not bring myself to support the clumsy romance of my friend.

"There, ma'am, that's the way he goes on—we can make nothing of him; and if you can't, I don't see what's to happen. More pie? that's only to deceive you, ma'am; remember yourself, Donald—think of the nausea. Did you take the palpitation drops before starting?"

"No, I didn't: what nonsense you talk!"

"Ah! I see I must have a serious conversation with him," said my aunt, now convinced there was something wrong.

"Thank you, ma'am," said Dolly, fervently; "it's the only thing that can save him."

Luncheon being ended, we returned to the

drawing-room; and here, remembering I had an urgent letter to write, I asked my aunt to let me do so. "And meantime," I said, "you might show Captain Burrige your collection of curiosities."

"With all my heart," said the good lady. "Will you come into the anteroom, Captain Burrige? not that I have anything worth exhibiting."

My aunt's collection was certainly not of special interest, though, notwithstanding her disclaimer, she looked upon it as a British Museum in miniature. There was the sword of a sword-fish, the one or two inevitable cases of South American stuffed birds, an ostrich's egg, a canoe-paddle, some coins, a spurious autograph of Mary Queen of Scots, a Bible that had (not) belonged to Oliver Cromwell, bits of the wrappings of a mummy, &c. &c. &c.; but the principal gem of the collection was—rather a Byronic one, it must be confessed—a human

skull. And here I must mention, that at the time she made uncle Blogg the happiest of men, my aunt was a widow. My uncle was Number Two. As to Number One there was a slight historic haziness. My aunt alluded to him but in a general way to the world, and not often; but when she did, she spoke of him as "the General." He died at the age of twenty-three, and his miniature, in a nondescript uniform, enriched her museum. Gazing, as a boy, on that work of art, I used to think that promotion must have gone very fast in those days, and even went so far as to examine history for some record of the splendid deeds which had won, thus early, his exalted rank for General Hanks—but in vain. At last an uncle of mine, whom I was always badgering on the subject, inconsiderately lost his temper, and remarked as to the deceased warrior, "General! general, be hanged! no more a general than my grocer is: he was a deputy-assist-

ant-commissary-general—a grade inferior to that of an ensign, or rather no grade at all—and his greatest exploit was purveying rum and pork to a small force sent out against some savages somewhere—and, by the by, I believe the said savages ate him at last.”

This was a terrible blow to me, as in my childish reveries General Hanks had figured as a sort of Bayard—habitually mounted on a white charger, with flowing mane and distended nostrils, always at full gallop—the warrior’s head adorned with a tremendous plume of white feathers, which marked by their presence where the carnage was thickest, &c. &c. &c.

I’m not going to say that the skull was the skull of my mythical hero ; but let aunt Blogg describe it herself, as overheard by me sitting at my letter. I had heard it a hundred times before, of course, with a hundred varieties. Burrige affected a deep interest in the museum, and questioned my

aunt about everything. At last they came to the skull.

"A skull!" cried Burridge.

"Yes," said my aunt, exulting in that her hour had come, "a skull—neither more nor less."

"Real or sham?" inquired Adolphus.

"Oh! a real human skull, sir; feel it."

"So it is—how nasty!"

"And yet," says my aunt, "it is the relique of a handsome man."

"Was he, was he a relative?"

"No, sir; you see before you the skull of the great Mingery-ghe-Pidgery, chief of the Dogs-eared Indians. His name means 'Scalper-of-the-wind,'—an awful name, is it not?"

"Terrific. Was he a great dab at scalping, then?"

"Yes, sir; he scalped everything he came across—with one exception," added my aunt, dropping her voice mysteriously.

"I'm glad I never met him," said Burrige; "but who was the fortunate exception?"

"It's quite a little romance," simpered my aunt, according to a formula I knew but too well; "but you wouldn't care to hear it, I'm sure?"

"Indeed, ma'am, I should like nothing so much—I delight in horrible stories."

"Well, this is not *horrible*, exactly; it's thrilling and exciting, certainly. You see my first husband, General Hanks, was employed on the Indian frontier against the Redskins. I accompanied him in all his campaigns, and shared his wigwam in front of the army. The Indians are a stealthy acute race" (this was a stereotyped phrase which always made me laugh), "and their spies may have been said to live in our midst. The great Mingery himself, on one occasion, reconnoitred in person, and saw me through a chink in the wigwam. I was but a girl then, Captain, and I'm an old

woman now, so I may say without vanity that I *was* a very pretty girl." Burridge made a sort of gurgling sound at this, apparently to indicate that the present tense was still applicable. "Oh no, sir! I'm past vanity now; but then it was different, and I was, as I say, a pretty girl; and the great Mingery, seeing me through the chink, fell desperately in love with me, and determined to carry me off.

"The General was away foraging at the time. In the silence of the night Mingery and his crew crept up to the wigwam, scalped seven soldiers and my white maid, and carried me off in a swoon into the thickets. I am bound to say that he treated me with great politeness. He spoke perfect English, and as soon as I came round proposed marriage very deferentially. As well as my fears would permit, I pointed out to him that I was already married to the General. 'I laugh,' he said, majestically—'I

laugh at his white nose ; nevertheless, since your slightest wish is my law, the barrier shall be removed at once. Here, Swashee-Boshee !' he said to a gigantic savage, 'shoe yourself with the west wind, and travel towards the sunrise ; take lightning in your right hand, and scalp me this son of the Pale-faces who stands between Mingery and bliss !' Swashee-Boshee uttered a horrible war-cry, and dashed into the forest, brandishing his tomahawk. I immediately fainted, and remained in that condition the greater part of the day. Whenever I had a gleam of consciousness I saw Mingery standing about thirty yards off, playing a wild air on a tin whistle, which I believe is the first part of their marriage ceremony. But towards evening a sudden shouting arose, and the trampling of feet ; and just as I opened my eyes I saw Mingery, with the whistle still between his lips, give a spasmodic leap into the air, turn a complete somersault, and

light on the tall plume of feathers which adorned the back of his head. He was shot through the nape of the skull, Captain—there's the very hole, you see. Then the soldiers closed in, and there was scalping and bayoneting for a good half-hour, for the tribe had rushed from their ambush on the approach of the troops. My poor General fell a victim——”

“What! did they scalp the General?” cried Burridge, with great enthusiasm.

“No, he fell a victim to a fever contracted that day from malaria and nervous excitement, and died three weeks after. But he decapitated Mingery, and brought his skull home with him, and had it cured by the doctor——”

“What! galvanised? did he grin and chatter horribly?”

“No, no—I mean boiled and scraped; and the General told me, almost with his last breath, to preserve it as a memorial—

and so I have, you see. And my poor Blogg used to say, in his laughing way, that he was jealous of the skull—and that's its history."

That my aunt had some sort of a foundation for the tale I never doubted. In its present stage of development, however, I suspect it would hardly have been recognised by any of the actors in the drama it professed to chronicle. But then five-and-forty years' constant wear and tear! what anecdote of mortal man could preserve its identity through such a test? I heard Burridge expressing his delight with the tale, and also his opinion that we mustn't be too hard on the Scalper-of-the-wind, as he (Burridge) could easily see that the temptation to abduct must have been almost irresistible. I heard my aunt, evidently in great delight, disallow extenuating circumstances to the deceased savage; and then they passed on to other objects. I became engrossed with my letter; but at its conclusion I was aware

that there was silence in the anteroom—or, at least, that it was only broken by a rapid and confidential whispering.

Presently my aunt emerged, and said, "Donald, I'm ashamed to trouble you, but would you do me a great favour?"

"Certainly, aunt ; what is it?"

"I have a large sum of money (£300), which has been paid to me this forenoon. I don't like keeping so much in the house ; would you mind taking it to the bank in Pall Mall for me ? I'm ashamed to trouble you, and drive you away when you've come to see me."

"I'll be delighted, of course ; but it will do as we go back to the Club, won't it?"

"No, that's just it ; the bank will be closed : pray take a cab, and come back as quick as ever you can."

She handed me the notes, and I departed.

On my return, in about half an hour, Burridge was not there ; he had remembered an

engagement, my aunt said, but would meet me at the Club.

“I have taken quite a fancy to him,” she went on; “so simple and nice and gentlemanlike—and then he is *so* like you, Donald.” My aunt’s manner was very fluttery; there was something in the wind evidently. “He has a great affection for you, dear Donald.”

“Oh yes! we’re particular friends.”

“And his anxiety about your state is quite remarkable.”

“Tut, aunt—my *state*! What rubbish the fellow has been talking!”

“No rubbish at all, I can assure you,” she said, with a look that beamed intelligence; “to be frank with you, I know all about it.”

“Which is it then, aunt? Is it the lungs, or the liver, or the heart?”

“The heart, Mr Donald—the heart. Good Captain Burr ridge has thought it his duty to let me into your secret.”

“Very impudent, then, of good Captain

Burridge, that's all I can say," I rejoined, affecting pique.

"I must say, Donald, that you have shown little confidence in me."

"My dear aunt, I won't affect to misunderstand you ; but pray what good end is to be attained by whining my miseries at the corner of every street?"

"That's a very different thing. Now good Captain Burridge has told me of your delightful attachment—the lady so good, so beautiful, and of *such* high rank. I am more pleased than I can tell you, dear Donald ; but good Captain Burridge tells me you consider your income insufficient, and will not go forward in consequence. *He* thinks the income quite large enough (he is a simple creature), and begged me to persuade you that it was. 'Donald's terribly proud,' he said, 'and he thinks that to ask an earl's daughter to marry him on £500 a-year, would be like asking her to live in

a poorhouse. I confess,' said the good Captain, 'I can't see it; if the girl likes him, as she does, she likes him for himself, not for his money.' That's all very sensible, my dear, of course, but I agree with you, and I like your pride. Blood is blood, and rank is rank, and much is due to it. It would be ridiculous to talk of such a marriage on such a paltry income; and even the good Captain came to see it."

"Yes, yes, aunt; I know that, and therefore let us change the subject. How are the canaries?"

"No, Donald—and I'm not pleased with you about this—you hurt me by your distrust in me. You know how I have always loved you?"

"That I do, aunt, and I'm sure I meant no unkindness."

"Well, why not have come to me and said, 'I'm in distress, help me'?"

"I'm not a beggar."

“Beggar ! there’s your pride again ! but I like it. Still you know I’m your aunt, and well off ; and to whom should you go, if not to me ?”

“ I never meant to go to any one.”

“ I know that, and good Captain Burridge said, in his droll way, ‘ I’ve more money than is good for me, ma’am, and I vow to you, if it wasn’t for fear of Donald finding it out, I would anonymously settle a thousand a-year on him, and make him jolly, for I like him better than myself, and I can’t bear to see him broken-hearted ; but he’s so proud—he would shoot me like a dog, ma’am, if he discovered it.’ A noble fellow he is ! but do you think your aunt, who has known you since you were teething, is going to be outdone by a stranger ? Never !”

What unsuspected depths of cunning and *finesse* this serpent Dolly had discovered ! It was awful ! I felt deeply ashamed of the—of the—well, after all, it was neither a

fraud nor a deception—it was only a little—say diplomacy.

“ Now, Donald, I’ve not had time to arrange my ideas, of course, but it just flashed across my mind how delightful it would be if you and dear Rose ” (here was a boldish flight of anticipation!) “ were to come and live with me! That would settle all difficulties. My establishment would be useful to you ; and your society and that of your friends would be delightful to me. I would adopt you, Donald, you and dear Rose, and all your children ! ” And the good lady looked wistfully at me. There must be a grain of self, I suppose, in the purest benevolence, and I can’t help suspecting that at this moment there flashed across my aunt’s mind the vision of an *entrée* into circles whence she could command a view of Lady St Ubbs and other her existing deities standing outside in the dark—envious but impotent.

“No, aunt,” I replied; “your kindness is above anything I ever dreamt of; but that would be too much. Even if everything else suited, it would never do to ingraft a young establishment, with all its newfangled dissipated ways, upon your well-ordered household. Your old servants” (this was her weak point) “would rebel to a certainty. Besides, I could not give up my profession; though, depend upon it, aunt, if ever I *have* income enough to marry, I would wish that we might be as much with you as possible. There is no one from whom a young wife could derive greater advantage than my dear good kind aunt Blogg.” I spoke with enthusiasm—her kindness carried me away into the hyperbolical, I fancy; but I believe I spoke out of true heart. She was a good old soul.

“Well, Donald,” she rejoined, “if we can’t have a joint establishment, you shall have one of your own. As to income, just

refer his lordship to my solicitor, and I *think* he'll be satisfied. And now, my dear, are you happy?"

"I don't know what to say to you, aunt; it is impossible for me to take this from you. I should feel like a robber."

"Donald," said the old lady, "if you breathe such an idea again, I shall fancy you care more for your childish pride than for Lady Rose, and that you are too selfish to give *me* the happiness of helping you to be happy."

Here was an irresistible argument — at all events I couldn't resist it, and I left the Hotel Blogg treading upon air.

When I found Adolphus at the Club, he looked guilty, and ensconced himself behind a large glass of sherry.

"Oh you scoundrel!" I cried; "oh you deep designing villain!" but BurrIDGE saw by my face that he was considered a benefactor.

“Is it all square, old boy?” he said, eagerly.

“All square, Dolly; but it was infamous of you to play on the old lady’s feelings. You are a serpent, Adolphus, the most brazen of serpents.”

“Upon my life, I said nothing I didn’t mean, except about your aunt being still a pretty girl, and about your living on five hundred a-year. She’s a good soul, Donald—a regular trump; but do you know she has some awfully queer notions?”

“I don’t doubt it, Dolly.”

“Yes, devilish odd, about rank and big-wigs, and so on. She wanted to know if your children would have any sort of handles to their names. I said certainly, but that I wasn’t quite sure what. I thought of telling her the eldest son would be a baronet, and the younger children, male and female, C.B.’s. I think she would have believed it; upon my life, I believe she would.”

“ Perhaps, but I’m glad you didn’t. She’s been tremendously kind.”

“ So she has, God bless her ! See me through another glass of sherry, and we’ll drink her health. The Scalper missed a right good wife at all events, whatever her beauty may have been. Here’s to her ! ”

CHAPTER XIV.

“Oh, fickle Fortune ! why this cruel sporting ?”

My mind was no sooner relieved as to the pecuniary bar to my wishes, than back came all my carking doubts as to Lady Rose's real disposition to me. Sure as one end of the beam flies heavenward, so surely is the other correspondingly depressed ; and I was ready, self-torturing, to explain away, on the most dismal hypotheses, all the symptoms in my favour which her manner had betrayed. As for that last scene in the garden, from which I had derived so much hope—what was that ? what was it but the finishing scene in her little drama, upon which the

drop—in the shape of that old harridan Mrs Badger—prematurely fell? Or, to take another metaphor, she had been playing her salmon, had him wriggling in the shallows, the gleaming “gaff” was in the air, and the *coup de grace*—capturing and slaying at the same moment—would have fallen, but that her felonious hand had been arrested by the arrival of a witness.

But I won't moralise about Care—we have enough of her in real life—so let me not dismount her from the crupper, or disembark her from the trireme, to usher her into these pages; and let me omit to chronicle how, as I travelled campwards that night, she gnawed me “*iniquo dente*,” and content myself by saying that, writhing under the tortures she inflicted, I wriggled myself into a desperate but calming resolution.

That I should postpone my declaration until Burridge's affair was cleared up was

apparently the ludicrous position in which I stood at present—a striking instance of the nonsense a timid and incoherent lover can bring himself to talk for the purpose of approaching his object under cover. Yes; strictly analysed, it stood thus, that my matrimonial hopes were to depend upon the detection of some possible moral lapse on the part of Carlotta! I blushed—I verily blushed—as well I might, when I found myself *vis-à-vis* with the indecent absurdity of the idea. It was intolerable; and the resolution I came to was this, that, *coute qui coute*, I would cast the die to-morrow. It was past midnight when we reached the camp, but the click of billiard-balls was still audible from the hut devoted to that amusement; and from the windows of the mess anteroom lights still shone. Wishing Burridge “Good-night,” I repaired thither. It was tenanted only by a beggarly array of empty tumblers—the *reliquiæ Danaum*—

and by *that* one inevitable hazy subaltern asleep on the sofa. Wanting this last feature, the equipments of an anteroom towards the small hours would seem to be incomplete indeed; though why, his bed being adjacent, he should sleep there, seems to fall under the Dundreary category of things incomprehensible. The slumberer was, of course, quickly awakened, and the unfailing Aldershot question propounded, "Is there a field-day to-morrow?"

"Field-day?" yawned the sub—"yes, I should think there was, of the most aggravated description. Under arms at 8 A.M.—twenty rounds of blank ammunition—several Royal Highnesses and an American general. Couldn't well be worse. How they do nag us here, to be sure! but, thank goodness, it's our last!"

"How?"

"How! haven't you heard about the *route*?"

“Not I; what *route*? I’ve just come from town.”

“Well, that’s good: bless you, the *route* came before mess to-night. We’re off to L—— in three days.”

“To L—— in three days?”

“Yes, a filthy hole, they say; and a three-company detachment starts for M—— the day after to-morrow. A, G, and F companies;—and, by the by, I forgot; of course, you’re to be in command of them. So you’re off, the day after to-morrow; and that gets you out of to-morrow’s field-day. The detachment’s struck off everything—luck for you—it *will* be a hot one to-morrow.”

“Is all this in orders?”

“All of it.”

“Surely you’re dreaming or chaffing?”

“Why should I? there’s nothing wonderful in it, is there? And, by Jupiter! I think we’ve had our share of the mill; and

now, I suppose" (regretfully) "I *must* go to bed."

It was very true, as he said, there was nothing extraordinary in it, but it was such a sudden *bouleversement* of my ideas and plans and wishes, that I could scarcely take it in at first. In the order-book, however, which I found open on my table, there it all was inexorably in black and white; and if farther confirmation were necessary, it was thoroughly brought home by finding that my servant had already packed up nearly everything, and specially those articles indispensably necessary till the last moment.

I was distracted, however, from future woe and present discomfort by one all-engrossing consideration, and that was, that being limited to one day for my operations, I simply *must* carry out my lately-formed resolution, and literally *on the morrow* bring the momentous question of my love to an issue. With a broader margin there

would have been room for panic or procrastination ; now, there was none. Necessity, mother of invention, only certain inspirer of action ! It seems to me that she does not get half enough of credit for another of her attributes, and that is, as a tranquilliser of the mind. This contemplation of the inevitable calmed me wonderfully ; and reflecting on the good fortune which had taken me to town on that very day, and on the happy results of the journey, without which I should have been all at sea, I went to bed, determined to rise at *réveillé*, get all business connected with our move over by noon, and devote the rest of the day to the paramount matter.

It needed not the blare of bugles and other early sounds of camp-life to rouse me from my slumbers. They had been deep, but I started from them at sunrise, with a mighty thump of the heart brusquely inviting me to contemplate the hazards of the day.

Men take a more sanguine view of their difficulties at night than in the morning. I suppose nature kindly so arranges it, in order that sleep may come and gird them up to face with vigour what daylight, the disillusioniser, presents in grim reality.

My sleep had been as sound as possible, and when I rose it was a beautiful morning—not a cloud in all the sky—and the sun looking as if he meant to give it them hot and strong in the Long Valley; but notwithstanding sound slumbers and the cheering influence of a bright summer morning, I felt no small sinking of the spirits as I began to speculate on what the next few hours were to bring forth.

Fortunately I was not long permitted to indulge in such thoughts; for very soon began to flow in upon me that stream of visitors which an impending move inevitably draws upon the devoted captain. The adjutant, with sheaves of documents, returns,

and instructions (for I was to be in command of the whole detachment); the paymaster, with his budget of worries; the quartermaster with his; my colour-sergeant with a hundred notes and queries; my pay-sergeant, with many subtle questions of finance; despairing tradesmen from the town, praying for liquidation on behalf of defaulting privates; insolvent privates imploring advances; the irrepressible soldier's wife, "married without leave," therefore ignored by a paternal Government, and left to the bounty of a patriarchal captain, and inevitably requiring £1, 7s. 8d. to clear her out of the present quarters, and a similar sum to convey her to the scene of new depredations; my groom for instructions about Crosstree; Jew hucksters, to know if I was inclined to relieve my baggage by parting with a few articles of dress; soldiers about to be discharged, to look out for a tip and a character. It took seven good

hours' work to dispose of all this ; and it was considerably past noon, and the music of the returning division was already audible, when I found myself putting Cross-tree's head, for the last time, in the direction of F——.

As I had had no time for reflection all the morning, so I resolved to give myself none now, and poor Crosstree suffered for the philosophic resolution, having to perform the journey at a pace that vexed even his willing spirit. The familiar objects of the way, at which his speed was wont to be relaxed—the memorable hill, the oracular hedgerow, the grove that had witnessed my earliest demonstrations — these were all passed indifferently ; and it was not till Pan, Syrinx, and the Araucaria were behind me, and the hall-door of the Hermitage stopped the way, that I drew my rein.

I was conscious of much excitement of manner as I put my stereotyped question,

"Mrs Badger at home?" She was at home, and I went up to the drawing-room.

"Gracious heavens! Captain Bruce!" she cried; "what a disappointment! You're not at the Review!"

"No, Mrs Badger, I'm not, and I'm sorry you're sorry I'm not."

"You didn't see them, then?"

"Who?"

"Why, the girls and Badger, and the Melvilles and Morrisises—they've all gone over to the camp to see the field-day, and they hoped to pick you up after it, for they're going to make a day's pleasure of it, and picnic ten miles on the other side of Aldershot, I believe. I'm sure they'll be very sorry to have missed you—they're sadly in want of gentlemen, too."

I stared stonily at Mrs Badger; I was benumbed, petrified, and could say nothing, till I was recalled to myself by her question,—

"How do you come to be away from the Review?"

"Because — because I've come to say good-bye," I faltered, absently.

"Good-bye! who to? why?"

"I've come to say good-bye to her — that is, to you and Mr Badger and all the little Ba——, I mean the young ladies."

"Captain Bruce, is there anything wrong? You look strange—has anything happened?"

I rallied myself with an effort. I had hardly noticed what the good lady said; I had been engrossed with the thought, "How am I to see *her*?"

"Nothing wrong, my dear Mrs Badger, only I'm the most unfortunate of men. Our marching orders have come, and I'm off to-morrow."

"To-morrow! where? how? why? whatever are we to do without you? I'm quite sorry, I assure you, and we'll all miss you, especially Badger" (bless Badger!) "for you're

a prime favourite with him, you know. And is it *quite* fixed?"

"Quite; and I shan't even have a chance of saying good-bye to Mr Badger and your nieces—unless, indeed, you'll keep me here till they come back."

"Gladly would I, but it would be of no use—they don't expect to be back till ten or eleven o'clock. But don't you think you might follow them and find them?"

"I will!" I cried, starting up abruptly, and preparing to depart on the instant. "Good-bye, Mrs Badger. I have to thank you for much hospitality and much happiness. The —— road, you say? Good-bye!"—and I should think even her good-nature must have been sorely tried by my curt and unceremonious leave-taking.

A good man is said to be merciful to his beast, and I fear I forfeited on this occasion all title to the epithet, as, with raging disappointment and fierce hope jostling each

other in my soul, I mechanically urged Crosstree back, *ventre-à-terre*, to the camp. Dimly, however, from the chaos of my thoughts rose one merciful idea, and that was, that as the length of my afternoon's journey was indefinite, and as the Captain had already done some work, it would be well to procure some other means of transport; and with this intent I steered straight for the mess-hut, lounging about the door of which I found a score of officers. There was some surprise and some laughter as I tore up at a gallop, and a cry of "Holloa! Mazeppe! you're late for luncheon—the packing of the mess has begun. We feed no more in the halls where we have revelled."

"I don't want to eat any more; I want some one to lend me a dog-cart for the afternoon."

"You'll find it difficult to get such a thing," said an intensely juvenile ensign with very tight legs, very high gills, and

a face of the severest solemnity. "All of us—I mean, all the fellows who really know anything, or take an interest in their cattle, are giving them an off-day to day. The horses are going up to-morrow, you know ;" and he spoke with as much pomp as if he was announcing a change of ministry.

"Then you won't lend me yours, I suppose ?"

"Oh ! really now, I couldn't. I'd be glad to oblige, but it's a principle I've always stuck to—always rest your cattle before trayelling."

Now, six months before date, "the Doctor" at Rugby had, no doubt, frequent occasion to request the pleasure of a *tête-à-tête* interview with this dogmatist.

"But, I daresay," he continued, "you might get the pill-box." The pill-box was a fifth-hand brougham which, to the surprise and delight of all beholders, our surgeon had set up.

"Thanks ; the pill-box is too grand for my purpose. Where's Jack Leslie ?"

"Jack ? Oh ! he's *perdu* to-day ; he's been a good deal troubled with duns all the morning, and he's been flitting about like a ghost from place to place. I rather think you'll find him in your own hut ; he went off to try it. He said he thought it was about the safest place ; he had found the paymaster's office and the quartermaster's store both quite untenable, he said."

I went down accordingly to my hut, and on opening the door was greeted with a tremendous shout from the interior room.

"Holloa ! what the de-evil do you mean by disturbing a sick man — a regimental captain—when he's ill in bed ? Leave the hut you d——d scoundrel, whoever you are."

I advanced to the bedroom, and as I entered it, a figure in the bed dived like a duck under the sheets, whence a deep moaning began to proceed.

“Who’s this? what’s the matter?” I roared through the bed-clothes.

“Go away and don’t disturb me, I tell you,” responded a muffled voice from the blankets. “I’ve got tic-doloureux. I’ll have you put in the guard-room, whoever you are, as sure as my name’s Captain Bruce, of the —— Fusileers.”

I gave a sharp cut with my whip across the most prominent part of the enveloped form, and Jack Leslie uncoiled himself with a yell of agony.

“Bruce, by jingo!” he cried, sitting up and rubbing himself.

“Yes,” I said, affecting wrath; “get out of that bed, you impertinent young villain—how dare you?” and I gave him another cut with my whip.

“Don’t, Donald; don’t be savage. I couldn’t help it. I’ve been hunted like a rabbit the whole morning—upon my honour I have; and even when I was in the orderly-

room with the Colonel, that beast Chisel, the tobacconist, was flattening his nose against the window, waiting for me, and threatening to come in and report me. This was the only place I could get any peace."

"Get up, sir!" I continued, sternly, "and get me your dog-cart; I require it this afternoon."

"Do you?" said Jack, ruefully.

"Yes, I do."

"I was thinking of having a little 'out' myself," he said. "You see we're all asked to dine with the ——th, and it would be confoundedly hot, two regiments dining in one hut, so I thought I would tool over to F——, and have a last dinner at 'The Grapes.'"

"Ah! well, you see, that can't be arranged;" for what is the good of having a subaltern if you can't use him and all his effects as if they were your own property?

"Where are you going!" asked Jack.

"I'm not quite sure—somewhere beyond Odiham to join a picnic party."

"Take me with you?"

"Well, I don't see why I shouldn't—they want men, and I suppose in a strait of the sort you might pass for one. Go and get your trap, and get some cold stuff from the mess and a bottle or two of champagne—we had better take a contribution; besides, we may miss the party and have to depend on our own commissariat. Look sharp."

Jack had scarcely left me when my colour-sergeant presented himself. "Detachment to parade at six o'clock, sir, for the Colonel's inspection," said the man.

"To-night?"

"Yes, sir; all hands, in marching order."

"Very well."

I gave myself no time to execrate Fortune and her *celerēs pennæ*, grievously as she was deserting me, but walked desperately over to the Colonel's hut.

"Well, Bruce," said he, affably, "and how do your arrangements get on?"

"They were complete at one o'clock, sir," I said, with a Wellingtonian air.

"What! everything? and have you settled your attached men's accounts?"

"Yes, sir."

"That's well, Bruce—very well. It's a mistake to leave things to the last."

"Yes; sir, it is, as you say. You're thinking of seeing the detachment to-night, sir."

"Yes, at six o'clock. I made it late—I thought it would suit everybody better."

"I came to ask, sir, as I have a *very* special reason, if you could dispense with my presence. Leslie is thoroughly up in the company's affairs" (for I determined, of course, to sacrifice Jack), "and will be able to answer any question as far as that goes; and as for the other companies——"

Here the chief interrupted me—he was a

good fellow, but very particular; and nothing but desperation would have made me prefer the request.

“I’m really astonished, Bruce, that you should ask such a thing—you of all men. It’s a most improper request. I regret that you should have made it. I cannot dispense with your presence. Certainly not.”

The Colonel was angry. I saw the case was hopeless, and left in despair. What was to be done? It was past three o’clock now, and out of the question to go and be back in time for parade. I found Jack in his dog-cart at my door.

“You may put up the trap, Jack—there’s a parade.”

“The devil! when?”

“Six o’clock.”

“Shall you go after?”

“Ah! perhaps: I hadn’t thought of that—there may be time.”

“Let me have the use of your bedroom

till parade-time, Donald — or, by the by, will you lend me sixty-five pounds to square these kites? whichever you please.”

“I think I’ll lend you the bedroom, for choice, Jack.”

“Very well,” said Jack, and, handing the cart over to a servant, he retired meekly to his lair in my inner room. Six o’clock arrived, and the parade fell in. The Colonel came to it in a very unchristian temper: my unlucky request had quite upset him. He made a minute inspection of the three companies, and found innumerable little faults, especially with mine. There were several aggravated cases of long hair, misfitting tunics, absent chin-straps, ill-folded greatcoats; there was an abraded cheekbone—even a black eye; and the Colonel delivered a lengthy homily on each topic as it presented itself. Then he had to make a valedictory exhortation to the men on good conduct in out-quarters; and being a

slow man, it was half-past seven when the parade was dismissed.

“I’m afraid I’ve made you late for dinner with the ——th, Bruce,” said the Colonel; “but I daresay it’s no great penance; and, indeed, there are one or two little things I really want to speak to you about still: so come and take a chop with me in my hut, and we’ll combine dinner and business. Come along now, for dinner will be ready.”

Oh fate! oh fortune! oh execrable Colonel! It was in vain, then, that I had lain down late and risen up early—all my efforts were in vain; and this chop was indeed the vainly-eaten chop of sorrow.

It was an extinguisher—the chance so keenly pursued had eluded me, and fled to the limbo of remote possibilities. What hope was there of its recurrence? when could it recur? Deferred hope is heart-sickness to all manner of men—to a lover, hope indefinitely deferred is akin to despair.

“Time,” “Absence,” “Distance,” are words that fill his soul with sinister presentiments; they are the dark antithesis of his burning central thought; they conjure up the idea of a wild ocean of changes and chances rolling between him and his wishes and hungering to engulf his hopes—an ocean fed by all the waters of Acheron, and Phlegethon, and Styx, and Lethe. With these words ringing in my ears, with these sombre impressions weighing on my heart, I sat with the fatal Colonel at his fatal meal, absent and abstracted, mechanically replying to his peddling pipe-clay twaddle in the stereotyped jargon of routine, and leaving entirely to him the onus of making conversation. He saw there was something wrong; I fancy he concluded that I was offended with his roughish strictures on parade—for his manner was for a time conciliatory. Eventually, however, he lost patience and gave me a pretty broad hint to say good-

night at an early hour ; and, nothing loath, I betook myself with my heavy burden of grief and disappointment to my hut. There I found Burridge impatiently awaiting me. He had only heard that evening of our impending departure, and had hurried up full of concern to say good-bye and administer consolation. Indeed, my departure was almost as severe a blow to him as to me, for it cut off the only link that kept him in a sort of *rapport* with Mary, and robbed him of that confidential daily talk on *the* subject, which is the elixir by which a lover lives in absence.

“I’ll tell you what it is, Donald,” he said, after the lugubrious view of the situation had been thoroughly considered—“there’s only one thing for it. You must get leave and come back here, and stay with me, as soon as ever you can, and carry your matter to a triumphant conclusion. Promise me you will.”

So I did promise, as soon as I had got the detachment settled down, to get leave if possible and return—and—and “try my luck, at least.” I was reduced to this feeble state of mind again.

“It is only *au revoir*, then,” said Burridge, as he left.

“I hope so,” said I, “but it is a long way, and getting leave may be impracticable, and when I come she may be gone.”

“Nonsense: *au revoir*.” “Amen.”

The detested journey was accomplished the next day, and hundreds of miles lay between me and Lady Rose.

My first care on arriving was to write a note to Badger, expressing my great regret at missing him when I called the day before to say “good-bye.” I told him that my regret was lessened, however, by the expectation of returning to Aldershot very early, where I had been obliged, from our sudden departure, to leave a *most important* matter unaccom-

plished ; and when I did return I hoped to find him and *all his circle* in a flourishing condition.

I knew the letter would be read in open court, and I hoped that the underlining of certain words would convey to Lady Rose a sense deeper than they suggested to the mere Badger.

My hopes of a very early return to Aldershot were, however, much damped next day by a letter from the Colonel, saying that he heard the district was in an unsettled state, and strike-disturbances apprehended ; that therefore, until the Major, who was to command us, and who had gone on a month's leave, joined the detachment, he hoped I would "stick very close" to it, especially as the other officers were very young.

To ask for leave was therefore impossible, and there was nothing for it but to await the Major's arrival with what patience I might command. The idea of proposing to

Lady Rose by letter occurred to me once or twice in my most desperate moments, but I discarded it; there was an ill-omened smack of the sneaking and the pusillanimous, a sort of vote-by-ballot suggestion, about it that deterred me, and I resolved that by the utterances of the *viva vox* I should stand or fall.

The month passed away, moving with leaden wings. Let those who have been in similar circumstances recall their feelings, and read in them mine, during its progress; and let those who have not be thankful, nor seek to know prematurely what the future may not unlikely have in store for them yet.

The month passed away, and the Major arrived. Bounding like the roe, I went to demand my release.

“No,” said the Major; “it is impossible, my good fellow. The inspection may come off any time in the next four or five weeks, and the Colonel’s desire is that there should be no leave until that is over.”

Was there ever to be an end of this? It was like ascending mountains of unpleasant altitude, when a seemingly endless succession of new summits presents itself to the panting climber.

CHAPTER XV.

“Ther dronkenesse regneth in any route,
Ther is no conseil hid withouten doute.”

—CHAUCER: *Canterbury Tales*.

“Donde hombre no piensa salta la liebre.”

—*Spanish Proverb*.

The hare starts where one is not expecting it.

INDEPENDENTLY of my own internal causes of discontent, the quarters in which we now found ourselves were anything but pleasant,—a large manufacturing town, with an atmosphere vitiated by every chemical abomination; a Radical population, with “rat-tening” proclivities and a chronic tendency to strike; a millocracy who detested the military, and would none of them; and a neighbourhood of bloated aristocrats who so thoroughly ignored the town that they in-

cluded us in the ostracism to which they treated *it*. Such was the place in which our lines were cast. I may add that it always rained, that the neighbouring country was level and uninteresting, and for miles round the vegetation was blighted by the noxious breath of the town's million chimneys. Then there was no barrack accommodation for our billiard-table, and the billiard-rooms of the town were unavailable, being infested by unclean and insolent manufacturers; racket-court there was none—nor cricket-ground; and months lay between us and the hunting season. Altogether there was nothing to be done but eat, drink, sleep, and grumble. To none of these occupations is the British officer averse, yet the honest fellow likes to vary his pleasures like others; and why not? Probably these gloomy accessories mattered less to me than to the others. Self-absorbed as I was, and engrossed in a superior source of trouble,

perhaps the dull monotony was even less distasteful to me than would have been a perpetual racket of gaiety. That, however, was by no means to prejudice my right to swell the full-toned chorus of discontent which rose in the barracks from morn to dewy eve, including in a comprehensive anathema the town and all its works, along with that sublime impersonality the Horse Guards, for dooming us to such a sojourn.

Those who had the largest aptitude for being bored declared that it was "the evenings that killed them," and I daresay so it was. There was no theatre nor public amusement of any sort, and desperate were the substitutes, even cheerfully accepted. A temperance lecture advertised for a fortnight previously had really been looked forward to with interest, and well attended from the Barracks. A wild-beast show which had visited the town for three days, and had four exhibitions per diem, was

punctually attended by many officers at every diet; so much so, that Jack Leslie declared that the lion, near whose cage they had sat on several occasions, had latterly always risen, grinned, and wagged his tail like a dog on the entrance of the Barrack party.

To us thus bored, then, and clutching at every straw in the way of amusement, it was a matter of no small excitement to see, one day, the walls and hoardings plastered over with flame-coloured posters inscribed in green letters with the word "*Hurrah!*" and nothing else. There was interest, there was hope, there was promise in the word; and the detachment said to itself cordially, "By all means—hurrah!" The posters continued to cheer away upon the walls without explanation for three days; and then came another mysterious inscription in yellow and blue, "Would you believe it?" This enigma was much canvassed. Practical men got angry and said, "D—n *it—what?*" Others

suggested that the mayor had gone mad, &c. &c. &c.: but no one could make anything of it. Expectation was therefore at its height when a third fulmination at all events asserted something—"Plotski is coming!" It was Plotski's advent, then, that we were invited to hail with jubilation in the first placard, and the almost unearthly happiness of that event that was suggested by the second.

But who the deuce was Plotski? his visit was gratifying; but who was he, and what? Was he a Polish refugee come to lecture on the wrongs of his fatherland? Was he an itinerant dentist, a vagrant homœopath, a conjuror, a wizard, or what not? Conjecture lost itself. Time must show; and it did, for a third placard announcing "He is here," was followed next morning by an inundation of hand-bills on the mess-table finally clearing up the Plotski mystery. These announced that the eminent Signor

Plotski, LL.D., of Amsterdam, Buenos Ayres, and Moscow, accompanied by his wife, the irresistible Madame Plotski (*née* Kartoffel of Bagdad), would, at the urgent request of the leading inhabitants of M——, favour that town with a two days' visit for the purpose of "lecturing (with experiments and scientific demonstrations) on certain phenomena connected with magnetism, electricity, and phrenology in their relation to the human will." This was very gratifying; and nothing could be more satisfactorily dirty and scientific than the appearance of the great man when he presented himself in person that forenoon to solicit the favour of our patronage. In countenance he was one of the most villanous and ill-favoured *savans* it has ever been my lot to contemplate. He wore a fez and black spectacles, and an all-enshrouding frock-coat of rusty black which reached to his heels, and suffered, here and there, to appear at abnormal crevices, hints

of some possible linen of an almost impossible griminess. His accent when he spoke was so incomprehensible and peculiar at first that we tried him in French. The sage, however, was ignorant of that frivolous tongue; he said, "yah," and "si," indeed, when interrogated as to his capabilities in German and Italian, but declined farther converse in them, alleging mysteriously that there "*was a cause*" which made *his own* language (which he omitted to name) or "*the Angleesh*" the only fitting vehicles for his thoughts.

"I have come, Gen'ral," he said, addressing the Major—"I have come, Gen'ral and gents, to talk a weesh out of my harrt. You 'av all 'eard of Pittagorass?"

"Oh yes!" said I, "of course we all know about him."

"Then I need not to tawlk about 'im;" and he paused abruptly. "You are aweer of grayvitation?"

"Yes, yes."

"Then I need not to stay long with 'im either."

"You are aweer that the mateeril forces are rig'lated in their developpment by a cat'nation of homogenous causes?"

"Yes," said the Major, frowning, and slowly nodding his head, dense as a turnip, as if making a gigantic effort to grapple with the subtlety of the idea—"yes, clearly so."

"Ferry well, so far; you beleeff in some-think?"

"Yes," said the Major, sadly bothered.

"You shall disbeleeff it all at my weesh," cried the Professor, snapping a pair of dusky fingers under the Major's nose.

"How?"

"You say four make more nor two?"

"Certainly."

"I shall make proof-ment that eet ees less!"

“Bravo, Professor!” cried Jack Leslie. “I’m a convert already, and I’ll be generous enough to pay two bob instead of four for admission to your entertainment to-night—is it a bargain? Reserved seats, mind.”

“Silence, Mr Leslie!” cried the Major, who flattered himself he was rather coming out in science; “be silent, sir!”

“Oh! eet ees ferry goot, so far; let ’im say ’is funny word. He shall come in for no sheeling at all, eef he weel geeve hees body for make exper’mient.”

“Thank you,” said Jack; “I’ll rather go back to the old faith, and pay four bob.”

“Ferry goot, so far; but I need not to delarge much now. You weel come, Gen’ral and gents—you weel come to my conver-sadzyony?”

“Oh, certainly!”

“Here are the permits;” and he produced a bundle of filthy tickets, and distributed

them, receiving money "according to the old faith."

"Professor," said an officer who had recently mounted a popular hobby, "I daresay you know something about spirits."

The Professor looked wistfully at him, but replied, "Tank you, not now; one glass wine—sherry, perhaps."

"Oh, sherry! certainly; but I didn't mean that. You deal in occult science; are you at all given to spiritualism?"

"To all science, sare; but not as a professor. In private I am ferry much with the spirits."

"Major," whispered the spiritual officer, "mightn't we ask him up to supper after the lecture, and have a little spirit-rapping?"

"By all means;" and the Professor was invited, and gladly agreed to come.

At the advertised hour we went down *en masse* to the lecture-hall. There was a good

house, and everything in due order for a meeting of the sort. Green-baize-covered table on the platform, tumbler and decanter of water, &c. &c. No Professor, however. Some time elapsed, and the audience began to express their impatience noisily enough. At last, a tall, wild-looking woman, with fierce black eyes, came hastily on to the platform, and addressed the meeting. Her utterance was rapid and indistinct, and she spoke in much the same remarkable lingo as that favoured by the illustrious Plotski. This was the irresistible scion of the Kartoffels of Bagdad.

She explained that she was in great distress, that the Signor had just had "one of his ep'lectic fits," which rendered a connected lecture from him impossible that evening. She hoped, therefore, the audience would kindly excuse the omission of the theoretical section of the entertainment, which was the Signor's province, and be satisfied with those

practical experiments and demonstrations which were hers. She appealed to the good-nature, &c. &c., of a British audience, and the audience cheered and were content.

Thereafter, in accordance with her invitation, there was a rush upon the platform of candidates for biological treatment.

"My lecture," she said, "is contained in six words—I can! I will! I do!" and straightway she fell to work with much energy and success to the constraint of the wills and the distortion of the bodies placed at her disposal.

What the theory of her operations may have been, I know not; in practice they were very simple. Having secured the attention of her patient, she directed him to stare fixedly into her eyes (and a very evil pair of optics they were) for a longer or shorter period. She then superadded a few mesmeric passes, or rapidly darted her

clenched fists close to his face, suddenly unclenching them as though releasing volumes of compressed magnetism. When this simple treatment was concluded, she pronounced the patient to be "in her power," or "under her control," which in the generality of cases he proved to be. She then ordered him to do her bidding, inviting and defying him to resist and disobey. In a short time she had about twenty subjects thoroughly under command; and the platform became the scene of a most Bedlam-like spectacle. Here a hapless individual was to be seen working his arms like the sails of a windmill. There another stood, in the attitude of Ajax defying the thunderbolts of Jove, with a sheepish shamedness of face finely contrasting with his tragic *pose*. Another wagged his head as if he would have wagged it off. Another hopped violently on one leg without gaining ground. Another was doubled up with in-

voluntary laughter. A church-warden-like person danced the "Perfect Cure" in a corner, with a deprecating simper on his face. As a central figure, a *very* bashful man (keenly alive to his horrible position) vehemently apostrophised the audience as "Ho! Hangelina! my hown! my beloved!" and it was a curious matter of speculation whether the aspirates were under his own control or supplied by the dominant influence. The features of the victims, working with intense spasmodic action—their swelling veins and starting eyeballs—showed that they were resisting, though vainly, the behests of "the Irresistible."

Nothing could be more successful. When the first batch was disposed of there was a call for more, and again and again there swarmed on to the platform scores of fresh assailants, anxious to match their volitions against the singular powers of the woman. It must be confessed that, on the whole, she

justified the title she had assumed. At the close of her experiments with the last batch, a "pale head" slowly and cautiously introduced itself at the door of exit from the platform, behind Madame — a pale head adorned with a fez and garnished with black spectacles. Madame was unconscious of the apparition, but not so the audience generally, who beheld with breathless interest what they supposed to be a premonitory symptom of some new *diablerie*, if not of the fiend himself *in propria persona*.

"The seance," Madame began to observe, "must now, to my shaggreen, feeneesh." The pale head here reinforced itself by the introduction of a villanous-looking claw, which was waved, as if in adieu, towards us.

"Waat you have seen," continued the lady, "is not much, but it is waat I can do. The offle malady of Saynior Plotski will not allow his prisence this night——"

"HA ! HA !" ejaculated the head, in the

basso profundo of a melodramatic ruffian, instantly withdrawing itself.

Madame gave a tremendous start and looked round, and a thrill of expectation ran through the audience. "The offle malady," she repeated, "of me imminent hosband, will not allow his prisence this night. I thank you—farewell;" and she bolted hurriedly from the platform, and through the doorway where the vision had displayed itself.

The audience loudly applauded, expecting that this was a *coup de théâtre* to work them up; but Madame not reappearing, and the officials proceeding to turn out the lights, they broke up mystified and murmuring, as well they might.

A supper had been prepared in the mess-room in honour of the *savant*; and although it seemed that his company could not now be hoped for, we, with the adaptability to circumstance of the military appetite, at once sat down to its discussion. The con-

versation, of course, turned upon the mysterious Plotski and his strange apparition at the door of the platform.

"My impression is," said the Major, pompously (he had suddenly constituted himself a biological authority)—"my impression is that, standing where he was, the Professor was exerting a magnetic influence upon us; he was compelling us to leave the place without objecting on the ground of an unfulfilled programme. I was quite conscious of a strange sensation when he threw out his hand."

"But what did 'Ha! ha!' mean?" inquired some one.

"Ah! that 'Ha! ha!' meant—I suppose that 'Ha! ha!' conveyed some impression—some—some—eh? to most of us, eh?"

"My impression, Major," said a pert youngster, "is, that the whole thing was a swindle, and when it was all over, 'Ha! ha!' meant 'sold again,' or words to that effect."

"Considering the success of the experiments," replied the Major, loftily, "the word swindle can scarcely apply."

"My impression," said another, "is, that the fellow was beginning to have another fit, and was telegraphing for assistance."

"Yes, that would account for his wife hurrying off as she did."

"At all events," I remarked, "I don't think we're losers by his absence now: a dirtier-looking ruffian I never saw."

"Genus *has* its eccentricities," said the Major, sententiously.

"I wonder if he ever was at Moscow."

"Devil a bit."

"HA ! HA !"

The sound proceeded from the doorway, and was the twin brother of the cachinnation lately under discussion. We all started, and looked towards the door, where, sure enough, were the "pale head," the fez, the

black goggles, and the waving paw of the Professor.

"I'm a lookin' at you!" he cried, archly applying his forefinger to his nose. "I hear you a-talkin' of me. Talk of the devil! 'devil a bit.' HA! HA!"

"Confound the fellow, he's mad!" muttered the Major, in great confusion.

"Come in, Professor; delighted to see you; just saying what a bore it was your not coming," said I, recovering my presence of mind, and rising to receive him.

"Gammon!" growled the eminent person. "I hear you a-carryin' on about me; but I'll come in: no malice; leastways none a drop o' brandy-and-wa'er won't make all right."

The Signor had apparently acquired the English tongue with considerable fluency since the forenoon, though perhaps not according to the best models.

"I hope you've quite recovered your—your—a—a—little attack, Signor Plotski,"

said the Major, blandly, as the invalid seated himself.

“Ah! that was gammon—a trifle of the old enemy, I mean. I’ll take some medicine though, if you’ll ’scuse the freedom.”

“Oh! certainly, certainly,” said the Major; “pray take every freedom.”

“But you must get it for me.”

“Certainly; but what would you take? The hospital is at hand—a draught or a pill of any kind? or——”

“Ha! ha!” roared the invalid. “Pills be d—d! brrandy and wa’rr to be sure. Why, man alive! professors and signiors have throats; they’re just like you all; thirst, thirst, thirst, that’s the d’sease—brrandy’s the perfick cure. Get’s a go o’ brrandy, old swivel-eye!”

This was addressed to our very respectable butler, who had a slight obliquity of vision.

“Martin,” said the Major, in a manner intended to rebuke the Signor with dignity,

“have the goodness to bring a small glass of brandy.”

“A small one for the Gen’ral, cock-eye, and a wopper for me,” amended the Professor. “I can’t abide your timble-fulls of brandy, gents; they take no grip of the stummick; what I likes is something to take me by the hinside, and shake me like a dawg.”

We had now a pretty fair notion of the nature of the malady which had prevented the Professor’s lecture. It was clear that the great man was far from sober, and was in fact a drunken English blackguard, Moscow, Amsterdam, and Buenos Ayres notwithstanding. At this juncture the Major rose, and muttering something about “an engagement,” left the room.

“And now,” said Plotski, when he was supplied with a huge beaker full of brandy which he scorned to dilute—“now that old Stick-in-the-mud’s gone, let’s be jolly! gay

young dogs all ;” and he shoved back his fez, and took off his goggles, thereby fully disclosing a most villanous countenance and a pair of bleering, blinking, red eyes.

“By the by,” he continued, “I don’t mind if I pick a bit ; any devilled truffles ? No ? Well, then, a fried hoyster ? None ? ’Ang it, you’ve no kweeseen, you coves ! When I dine with the Hemperor at Moscow, he’s always up to the mark. ‘Plotski, my jolly young waterman,’ he says, ‘I know your ’abits. Your tastes are genteel, but simple—come and feed to-day—taity, taity—no cardinals or nonsense—honly my himperial self—some devilled caivyhairry and four bottles of clo-voojo—in the smoking-room. Don’t dress.’ Oh ! he’s a wunner, is the Hemperor ! Here’s to him. Hurrah ! hurrah !” and he drained his tumbler with a gasp of satisfaction.

“Was any of you ever at Aleppo ?” he continued.

"Yes," said Jack Leslie, who constituted himself the chaffer of the mess in general—"yes, I was born there : were you ?"

"No, I wasn't born there : I aint *a-leper*. Ha ! ha ! ha ! twig ? ah ! ha ! ha ! ha ! not so dusty, eh ? ha ! ha ! ha ! I wasn't born there, but I was hambassador there wonst."

"From what king ?" said Jack.

The Professor blinked at him a moment, and then said, "If any one axes you the question, little pink-and-white, you can say it was from the King of the Cannibal Islands, if you like. I won't contradick you, and you can say I'm a Kokasian if he wants to know any more about me, and that I'll dine with him the first fine Sunday next week."

He emptied his glass, and nodded at Jack with his eye very tight closed, and then favoured us with an isolated scrap of intelligence.

"We drank nothink but 'Tickly-Bisky,' down at Aleppo—nothink ; it's strong—it

makes me thirsty to think of it: pass the bingo."

"You seem to have been a great traveller, Professor," I remarked.

"Yes, sir," said the Professor, and as his eye rested on me, it seemed to dilate and acquire a look of puzzled and hazy interest, almost of recognition.

"Why—damme!" he stammered, half rising—"damme!—it's—it's—oh! blow me tight! here's a go!" Then he took a pull at his liquor, nodded three times to me with an expression of drunken wisdom, and went on,—

"Yes, I've travelled, sir, all round the horange—I've seen men and manners—I don't mind saying I've seen a few things. I've been up the Nigel and the Cotty-Wotty. I've topped the 'Imalayas, and I've crossed the Rocky Mountains."

"The Rocky Mountains, have you?" cried an ensign, much interested; "a poor brother

of mine went with an expedition there, three years ago, and he has never been heard of since."

"His name, sir?" cried the Professor.

"Wilson," said the ensign.

"Which of the Wilsons, sir?"

"Thomas."

"Thomas Wilson—very fair?"

"As fair as I am," said the milk-white youth, "with a red scar on his cheek."

"That's the man, sir," cried Plotski, decidedly. "Poor Thomas Wilson is no more, sir; we were all starving; drew lots; lot fell on T. Wilson, and he was man-meat in half an hour."

"Wh-wh-wh-what do you mean?" faltered the ensign.

"Why, we ate him, of course. I had a grill of him, and a boil of him, and I had him cold, and then we had him heated up and hashed, and devilish tough the poor fellow was all ways. Give us the bingo

till I wash the memory of him off my palate."

I am afraid there was a shout of laughter at this disgusting anecdote, and young Wilson fled from the room.

"Pooh!" said the Signor, "he needn't fret—we all heat each hother in the Rockies;" and he plunged into his tankard.

On emerging therefrom his eye again rested on me, and winked. I returned it vaguely; he then shook his head and gave a drunken giggle.

"Let's have some spirit-rapping, Professor," said the spiritualist.

"What for?" said the Professor, on whom his repeated draughts were beginning to make awful ravages.

"Oh! get them up, and ask them all sorts of things—secrets, you know—you promised you would."

"Did I?" said Plotski, "then I'll keep the word. Plotski's faithful and true. I

don't need to rap. I don't care a rap. I'm a spirit myself. I am—what you want know? I could tell you all 'bout yourselves. Spirits tell me everything. Tap me. Blaze away," and he winked a very tight wink at me again.

"Tell us when we'll get out of this abominable quarter," I said, rising to leave the room, and putting the question to cover my retreat.

"Don't go—don't leave us, Thingummy," he cried. "I'll tell you—sit down—what was it?—Oh yes! I'll tell you—— Now I could tell you 'bout yourself. Your name's B— B— B— Hang it! Your name begins with a B; don't it, now?"

"Bravo! Professor; but any one might have told you that," said I.

"Devil a bit! You've been in India."

"Yes, of course; but everybody has."

"Devil a bit! You've been in love." There was a roar of laughter, hints of my condition having got abroad.

"Well," I said, "every one has."

"Devil a bit! You're married."

"Of course—of course," I said, to humour him.

"But you don't hit it off with the missus."

"Not at all."

"You've not seen her for six years."

"No, I certainly haven't."

"Give me the brandy," said the Professor, looking round the table with drunken triumph, "I'll rest after that; I've told you a thing or two." He took another tremendous pull: the man's interior must have been lined with cast-iron.

"Lawyers can do nothink for you like a clever bird like me. I'll tell you 'nother secret, now. You've paid money to try and g'rid of missus, and you can't—aint you, now?"

"Yes, of course."

"You've gone t'wrong shop—this is sh-shop for you, Bur-Burridge, my boy—that's yer blarmed name—I've got you at last."

There was a roar of laughter down the table, and the Professor blinked and nodded round at the laughers, like an owl surveying a row of candles, and feeling the worse of it.

I felt as if an electric telegraph had passed through my head. Who was this ruffian? Did he know all about Burridge? Could he be of any use? Had he really got a secret that could help us?

I composed myself and said, "Yes, but the secret, Professor?—the secret? How am I to get rid of this confounded wife of mine?"

"Ah! yes; that's wot you want to know—hic—of course; but the terms?—hic—the rowdies?—hic—the rhino? the flimsies? eh, old Burgage? What'll ye stand?"

"Tell me what you'll do first."

"I shay, d'ye remember Garden Reach? and Count Smufflefrowski a-ridin' through the desert, eh? Oh Lor! how the—how she did pile it up!—hic—mounteenious—hic—I call it, oh Lor! She's a clever one

—aint she now, Buggy? that blarmed wife of yours?"

"But you forget the secret—the secret."

"What'll ye give to b'rid of the she-male? Can'dly now, Cap'n?—be lib'ral."

"If you put me in the way of getting rid of her, if you give me real documents that will do that, I'll give you a couple of hundreds."

"Taint enough—I might be lagged myself; but I'll come round and talk a bit."

He rose and groped his way round to me, falling repeatedly in the transit.

"I'm sick of the d—d business—hic—I 'ont stand it, there. I'll p-p-peach for £250; promise me £250 and not to lag me—hic—and I'll p-peach for £250—I will, by gum!"

"I promise."

"Well, then, your missus was married when you—when you married the—hic—devil out in—in——"

"Hwhare is he? Tayke me to um! Show me mee hosband!" These words,

bellowed outside the door, immediately preceded the entrance of the Irresistible, who burst into the room in a state of the highest excitement. The shock tumbled Plotski off his chair, and he remained beneath the table, concealed. "Moighty noice offishers!" continued the lady, "moighty p'loite indeed, to keep a lady standin' out foreninst the door in the straye, and thim blayguards of soldgers to say sich things to the loikes of me! No admitt'nce, was it? Will, here I am, annyhow, and now, hwhare's mee hosband, Mr Impiddence?" and she fetched Jack Leslie a whack across the cheek which stopped his grinning. There was a very biological energy about the lady certainly. "Hwhare is he, ye varmints?" she screamed.

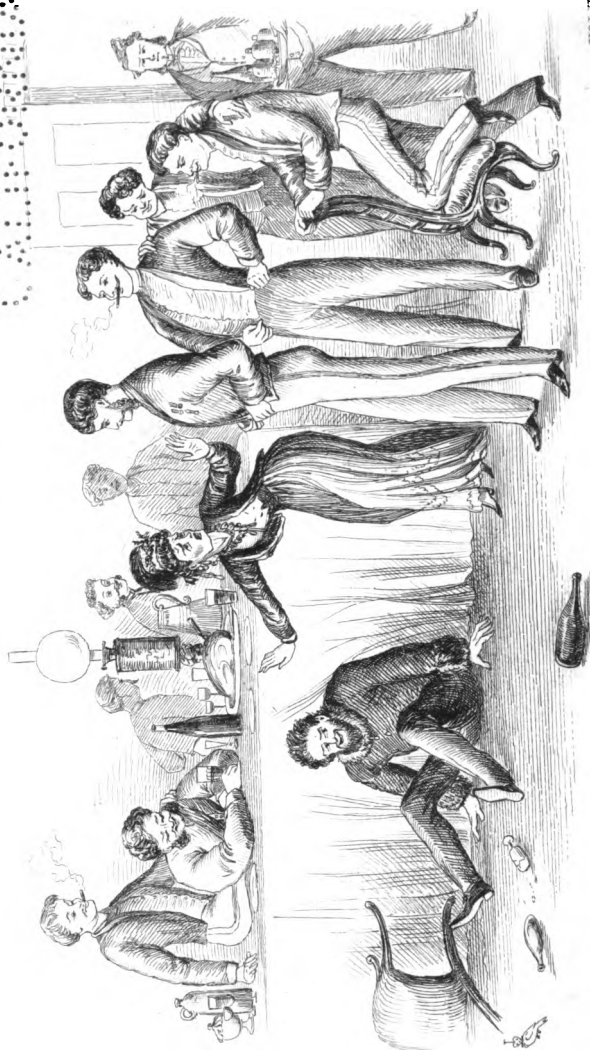
"Here," piped Plotski from his lair.

"Hwhare?" she cried, advancing.

"Here," rejoined Plotski, raising his white sodden face above the table—"here—drunk; and I shay, damme, I've done it! I've done

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"He's drunk jonlemen, belayve nothing he says"



with you too, you blasted witch! I've peached—I have, by gum!"

"Hwhat?" yelled the woman; then recovering herself, she raised her forefinger menacingly, fixed her horrible eye on Plotski, and ejaculated, as it were an incantation, "Cran - barra! Klimpski kho-bana!"

"Cranberry yourself! Give me a gi-gi-glimpse of the cabana, and I'll sh-shmoke him," cried Plotski. "I tell you I've done it (hic); I've sold! Three figures!—Two (hic), five, nought! that's my price—going, going, gone!" and his head came down with a bang on the table that made the glasses dance.

"He's dronck, jontlemen!" cried the Irresistible; "belayve nothing he says. Come home at wonst, Maximilian!"

"I 'ont, I tell ye. I aint a-goin' to be 'ocus-pocussed about the country—'avin' eclectic fits—and gammonin' (hic) 'bout

Bagdad and Leckchures—I'm done with it, I tell ye. Two—five—nought—Cap'n; come to King's 'Ed t'morrow—you'll 'av it all out."

"I'll be with you at ten," I said.

The woman looked keenly at me, and her countenance changed.

"He's been telling you nonsense, sir," she said. "You won't trouble to come?"

"Oh! I'll come to ask for the Signor's health," I said, with a laugh, and a look intended to convey the idea, "I only say this to humour him; I won't come."

There was some difficulty in getting the Professor off the premises; but at last the barrack-gates fairly closed upon him and Madame, and fainter and fainter from away down the empty street came back their voices—sounds of fierce vituperation, mingled with the shrill tipsy laughter of the man.

CHAPTER XVI.

“ If his occulted guilt
Do not itself unkennel in one speech,
It is a damned ghost that we have seen.”

—HAMLET.

To my brother officers the scene had suggested nothing but the disgusting intoxication of Plotski, and steps, indeed, had just been about to be taken for his ejection at the moment when the woman presented herself. The conversation which the Signor had addressed to me had excited no curiosity whatever, being set down simply to the maunderings of a drunkard ; so, after one or two little bits of chaff about “ getting rid of that abominable wife of mine,” we separated. I had little doubt now that I had got a key—*the* key, in fact—to the Burridge

mystery, which might unlock it — which *might*, if properly handled ; but obviously it was a case of great nicety. The fellow might deny everything in the morning—and what then ? He had been drunk—he had talked nonsense—he would remember nothing about it. Unfortunately I was *not* Burrige. Although he was satisfied of my identity, I could identify him in no way ; even if I could, by what legal process could I detain him, or force him to repeat, sober, what he had stated when drunk ? In his sober moments this biological woman would regain her ascendancy, and it was clearly her object to keep the secret which he had let out. That he had spoken the truth I had no doubt ; the woman's anxiety showed that at once. On recalling Burrige's story I had no difficulty in identifying Plotski with the individual who had figured in it, both in London and at Calcutta, as Count Doldorouski, plotting for the rescue of Car-

lotta's papa, and then as Bill Whytock, the rascally brother of that infamous woman. That he was her husband I had now scarcely a doubt. But this woman—who was she? Not Carlotta, certainly. Burridge's description of her did not at all tally with the characteristics of the "magnetic lady." Who was she, then? Her interest in the business was a vital one, clearly, and a hold over her would be a most desirable acquisition; but how to get it? Here I was all abroad.

Early in the morning, to be prepared against all contingencies, I extracted from the Major (under pressure of the most tragical representations of life-and-death business) a week's leave, and having packed a portmanteau, and mobilised myself generally, at half-past nine I presented myself at the King's Head and inquired for Signor Plotski.

"The Signor started by the nine o'clock train, sir," said the waiter.

"The devil! started for good and all? took his baggage?"

"Yes, sir, and the lady and everything."

"But he's to lecture to-night?"

"No, sir, the lady got a telegram, she said (she was out early), that called them away. But they're to be back on Monday, to give the second lecture."

"Where did they go to?"

"Can't say, sir, I'm sure; they went to the train—main line—that's all I know, from giving the cabman his orders."

Here was a checkmate. As I stood pondering, a man came up to the door and said to the waiter, "I wish to speak to Signor Plotski—I won't detain him a moment; say it's about the lighting the hall for this evening."

"But he's gone," said the waiter.

"Gone! where?" cried the man, turning white.

"Can't say, sir; he's gone, though."

"Oh the swindler! oh the scoundrel! oh the blackguard! done me out of a five-pound note as clean as a whistle."

"How's that?" asked the waiter.

"Why, I let him the room for two nights at £5 a-night, and was fool enough not to take the payment in advance."

"Oh! if you're the gentleman that owns the hall," said the waiter, "it's all right; he left a message for you that they're to be back to lecture on Monday, and you're to be sure to have the hall in order and send out the advertisements."

"That's a business-like swindler! Hall ready! advertisements out! chuck good money after bad! very likely—the infernal scoundrel!"

An idea occurred to me—a brilliant one, I thought—and I said, "I have a very strong reason for wishing to get hold of this fellow too; now, suppose we can find out where he's gone, we might telegraph to the

police to arrest him ; your charge is quite strong enough."

"But where has he gone?"

"Well, we can try at the station ; they are a remarkable enough looking couple ; the booking-clerk or some of the porters may have noticed their destination."

Down we went accordingly to the station, the lessee of the hall cursing and swearing all the way. "I could have told you he was a blackguard," he said, "and not to be trusted ; but he had such a good house last night, I never dreamt of his going before he had a second haul. I can't understand it. It's just my luck."

We had no sooner described the party to the booking-clerk, than he said : "Oh ! you mean the lecturer and his wife ? Yes, I can tell you about them : they booked to London."

"Sure ?"

"Certain ; I noticed it, because I meant to go back to the lecture to-night."

"When is their train due in London ?"

"Three o'clock."

"Bravo ! there's lots of time. Come, let us go to the police station." And in half an hour we had the satisfaction of knowing that, on the arrival of the Signor at King's Cross, he would find an escort waiting to conduct him to Government lodgings for the night.

I then telegraphed to Burridge at Aldershot to meet me in town—and to my agent, who had taken the case in hand some time before, to the same effect ; and at twelve o'clock I was myself rattling away to London in the express train due at 4.30.

I found Burridge and the lawyer already waiting for me at the hotel. At the station I had heard of Plotski's safe arrest.

Adolphus was nearly mad with excite-

ment. It was a quaint study to observe this plunger of elephantine stolidity prancing about the room like a maniac, tearing his hair and almost foaming at the mouth. One moment in rapture at the thought of release, shaking me by the hand, and slapping the lawyer on the back ; the next full of doubt and fear, then breathing the most murderous sentiments against Plotski : " I would have killed him, Donald, if I had been you—strangled the hound on the spot. How on earth did you keep your hands off him ? "

" It's a good case," said the lawyer—" it's a fairly good case ; the grand piece of luck is having him in confinement ; away from the influence of the woman, we have some chance of getting the truth out of him. I will arrange to get access to him to-morrow morning, in the police cell, on the plea of getting his evidence in an important case. And I think, I *do* think, Captain Bruce," he

continued, glancing at Burrridge, who was at the moment going through the motions of putting Doldorouski's head "in chancery," if you were to continue to personate your friend, and come with me in that capacity, it would be better. Captain Burrridge's excitement might destroy it all."

"How say you, Adolphus? shall I go for you?" said I.

"Ugh!" sobbed Dolly, throwing himself down with a sob of exhaustion after his strong pantomime. "Yes, Donald, it would be better; I couldn't answer for myself. I'm a good-natured bird generally, but, hang it, seven years of purgatory, and served out by this fiend! I'd be at him, I suspect. You'd better go." And so it was agreed.

"Mrs Burrridge is in London, herself," said the lawyer.

"Oh! hang it, man, don't call the devil by my name!"

"The alleged Mrs Burrridge, I should say;

it will simplify matters. Perhaps a warrant for her arrest might be obtained."

"Well," said Dolly, "I'd rather not, if it *can* be avoided. I owe *her* no kindness, certainly, but I don't want all the newspapers to be full of me and my adventures."

"I'm afraid that can't be helped; if the man confesses that he is her husband, and also his connivance at her bigamous marriage, he must be indicted of course."

"We must see what turns up at the interview with him in the morning."

Permission having been obtained to visit Plotski (who had been remanded pending the arrival of the lessee from M——) in his cell, the lawyer and I went thither about eleven o'clock next forenoon.

We found the wretch lying on a bench, looking horribly haggard and ill, apparently verging on that condition popularly known as "the horrors." He started up with an oath when we came in. "What! more

troubles! more people to swear me a thief! D—n you, Burrige! it's you. I hate you—you've plagued my life out. Curse your secret, our secret, her secret. Fifty pounds a-year! ha! ha! and chained to a tiger-ess! It aint worth it; blowed if it is. I'll peach—here goes!—listen to me peaching, gents. Once on a time——there was—ha! ha! don't you wish you may get it?" and, with an insane laugh, he sat down and put his head between his hands. Presently he began to writhe and groan and cry out.

"Oh God! it burns—it burns—it's splitting—it's bursting—it's blowing up! Catch hold of me, some one—quick! save me!" and down he fell on the floor in a fit. We got the surgeon at once, who brought him round with some strong application.

"You can't possibly speak to him now, gentlemen," said the surgeon.

"It's of vital importance," said I.

"I can't help it; he is in a very critical

state—he is unfit to be spoken to. I shall give him a quiescent now ; towards evening you may come back, and if it is at all permissible, you shall have access to him then.”

This was a terrible *contretemps*. He might not be visible that night, but he might be well enough to appear in court next day. The lessee would have arrived by that time, the case might be settled without imprisonment, and the Signor would be out of our control, and able to take himself off to Bagdad, Moscow, Aleppo, or the “Cotty-Wotty.” We had really nothing tangible to go upon—nothing but his own drunken utterances.

An idea occurred to the lawyer, and in accordance with it a telegram was sent to the lessee, begging him to delay his arrival in town for another day, and promising that his interests should not suffer thereby.

On presenting ourselves at the police station in the evening, the surgeon said, after

some hesitation, that we might see the man for a very short time. "He's quite quiet and rational now, but you'll find him in a very low state," he added, "and don't stay long with him."

Certainly the Signor was in a very dilapidated state. "Can't you let a poor devil alone?" he cried; "let me alone, to go off the 'ooks in peace."

"No, my good fellow," said the lawyer, quietly, "you're not going off the hooks; and if you were, it would be all the better for you to do the right thing once in your life. We shan't trouble you long. You gave the Captain here some information the other night at M——; it was sufficient for us, but it would save trouble and expense if you would be a little more explicit. Come now, my good fellow, out with the whole story."

"Can't you let a poor devil alone, and not come a-badgerin' and a-batin' him in prison?"

"No, Whytock—not at all; we don't mean to let you alone till we've got it out of you."

"You'll get nothing out of me," he said, doggedly.

"Oh yes! we shall," cried the lawyer, fumbling, with a very high action, for a note-book in his breast-pocket, which, when produced, he affected to study. "We know more than you think, my good man,—a ve—ry great deal more. It would save you trouble if you helped us to the rest—trouble and perhaps severe punishment. Just to show you that you are in our power, I may mention that we know things about you that you would hardly like the police to know, for instance; so you'd better try to be obliging." The lawyer threw this fly as a pure speculation, but seeing that it "*rose*" Mr Whytock by the agitation of his countenance, he followed it by a second and a bolder one, which might have ruined the

whole plan of attack. "Let me see," he continued, turning over the pages of the note-book as if trying to light on a date somewhere therein recorded—"let me—see ; at the time you were in Cal—cutta—you—had—been married to—the woman calling herself—Carlotta Seymour—just——"

"Who told you that ? who says that ?" cried the fellow, in great agitation.

"Never mind, my man—you had been, as I say, married——"

"It's a lie !" screamed the man : "no one can prove it ; I defy 'em to——"

"Gently, gently ; perhaps you'll deny next that Carlotta had been married before ; you see we've got facts, my man, and means that you don't dream of ; it's no good your denying things."

"Cuss your facts ; because she was married, 'taint necessary that *I* was married to her, is it ? I aint a-goin' to deny anything about *her*—why should I ? confound her !

I've kep' her secret; but she don't pay up half: fifty pound a-year to be chained to a tiger-ess that watches every drop I drink and every word I say, and 'unts me and makes a hass of me with her spyin' and pryin', 'occussin' about in black barnacles, and callin' myself a count and a signor—fifty pound a-year don't pay for that kind of game. I don't care a blow about her—not I. I'll be free—I will, by gum! and I'll drink wot I please and w're I please, and say wot I think; d—n her heyes!”

“Quite right—quite right; and you married her—— I mean, she married in the year—let me see—where is it?” and the lawyer scrutinised his notes again.

“Oh! she married—I can tell you the year and the month, too, for the matter of that. Fifty-three was the year—September was the month—Pancras was the church—and Tom Finney was the man. Tom Finney was carpenter at ‘the Surrey;’ she was

hactin' there then. I was a pal of Tom's, I was. I was at the weddin', I was. I see them register in the vestry. Her name's Hanne Mole, but she chucked up the Mole, and called herself Carlotta Seymour, which she registered. The Surrey people, they know the whole thing—the whole apothek. Tom Finney and she didn't square it. 'She's a bad lot, Bill,' says he to me one day, 'and my name's Walker. I'll have nothink more to say to her,' says he. 'She's robbed our landlord,' says he; 'and she's a reg'lar vagabone. I turn her off,' says he; 'the landlord says, to give her a chance, he'll be dark about the robbery—that's his look-out; she may go to the devil for me, and I'll never see her again,' says Tom. Well, she changed her theatre, and got on like winkin'. She's a clever one, she is; and she got on to the tune of twenty pound a-week once. I got back in the world—lost my berth at the Surrey, and was 'ard up—starvin' I was; so

I thinks, 'I've a pull over yon one along o' the robbery,' thinks I, 'and I'll go and look my lady up.' So I went and saw her.

"'Wot d'ye want, you disrep'ible-lookin' hobjick?' says she to me, quite 'aughty.

"'Money,' says I, 'and money I'll have.'

"'Police!' she cries.

"'Don't 'oller,' says I, 'or I'll split to your manager about your robbin' old Pobjoy's till.'

"Down she sat, quite pale, and gev me a tenner.

"'I'll take it in the mean time,' says I, 'and I'll hold my tongue purvisionally.'

"After that I was a good deal about her, getting fivers and suchlike, now and again.

"'Here again!' she used to cry, when I came in.

"'Yes,' I used to say, 'I've come to get some glue for my tongue.'

"There was a woman (my tiger-ess), Kitty Colooney; she was a dresser, and a bit of a

hactress, and a bit of a dancer, and a bit of a lot o' other things too. She *was* a clever one, but thirsty. She was useful to Carlotta, and when she got on in the world, went to stay with her, doing odd turns for her,—rehearsing now and again, makin' her clothes, and suchlike ; her maid, she called her then, but she was her pal, too, all the same.

“I kep' company with Kitty for a bit, then, and she says to me, ‘You’ve a pull over the missus, Bill,’ says she ; ‘but go halves, and I think I’ll be able to get a bigger screw on some day.’

“‘Agreed,’ says I, and it was so.

“Kitty had good sharp ears and good sharp eyes, and before long she comes to me and tells me that the missus is workin’ up to a second marriage with a hass of a hofficer (you, my fine feller), and that here would be a screw and no mistake ; and it was so. Soon after, Carlotta takes herself hoff to Ingia, ‘untin’ this youngster (you,

you know); and Kitty persuades her to let her go out, and be 'useful to her, and better herself,' as she said; and she hadn't been away four months when Kitty writes and tells me that the game's played, the missus married, and the screw on tight and sure, and it was so.

"Kitty got a pot of money to be quiet, and behaved on the square to me at first; but *that* didn't last, and I had to go to Calcutta myself to look after her. I soon let my lady know that I hadn't come all that way for tenners and fivers, and I did get a pretty tall figure out of her.

"Then the banker turned rusty, and you came down, and I nearly split, being partially tight, you remember; and then you paid me hoff. I went 'ome then, and Carlotta promised me wot she could give in the way of tips, and fifty pound a-year.

"I was at her pretty hoften for tips, and so was Kitty, I expect; for at last she got

desp'rate, and she writes to me, and she says to Kitty, 'My life's a burden along o' you two, and I'll give myself up—I will, and I swear it—unless you make a bargain with me to keep together and keep each hother quiet, and take your annuities—Kitty a 'undred, and you fifty—and bother me no more for your perquisicks, as you call 'em.'

"Well, we 'ad to make the bargin, and we've kep' together, and a fine dog's life it's been. Kitty's father 'ad been a biologist, and a mesmerist, and a conjuror, and hother things; and Kitty 'ad learned the tricks of the trade, and got 'old of a leckchure of her guv'nor's. 'We'll set up byologisin,' says she; 'it'll pay like fun, if you'll keep the muzzle on that big mouth of yours. You'll spout the leckchure in a wig and barnacles, and I'll work the hother horacle, which I can do. And she can, for her guv'nor 'd put her up to all the devilment, and all the tricks; and so we *did* set up; but I'm sick

of it, and I'm sick of 'er, and I've peached, and I'll be drunk for a year, if I like. That's the whole go. And just you get me out o' pris'n now, and 'and me over the flimsies, as per contrack—two, five, nought."

"I daresay that can be arranged," said the lawyer: "if we find you've told the truth, we'll pay the small debt for you, and get the charge withdrawn. As to the sum you mention, I can say nothing about that till I see Captain Burridge."

"Well, use your eyes, and look at 'im now, and talk away—no cer'mony with me—I aint proud, I aint."

"You mistake: this is not Captain Burridge, but his friend."

"Oh! Walker—oh! gammon—oh! you 'aven't got a nerve, I don't think. 'Cause I've got on barnacles, that aint to say there's a lot o' green in the white of my eye, is it?"

Declining to discuss this optical question,

or to argue out the point of my identity, we left Mr Whytock to his prison meditations.

"What do you think of it?" said I to the lawyer, as we left the police office.

"Think of it?" said he; "I think excellently of it."

"But do you believe his story?"

"I believe there is enough of truth in it to serve our turn; and we have been singularly lucky in getting it out of him. Depend upon it, he's committed some crime;—it was my haphazard hint that we knew something against him independent of this business that made him begin to be communicative; and of course his nervous state was all in our favour."

"What are we to do next, then?"

"Next?" said the lawyer, hailing a cab—"the Surrey Theatre, of course; we must unearth this Tom Finney."

"I believe we have just left Tom Finney," said I.

“Very well, we must identify him as such. All we want to prove is that the man who married the *soi-disant* Mrs Burridge was alive at the end of '57 ; whether his name was Whytock, or Finney, or Plotski, matters not a jot.”

But, to my surprise, we found from the officials at the Surrey Theatre a confirmation of Whytock's statement, so far.

Carlotta in 1851-53 had been engaged at that theatre. In the latter year she was believed to have married one of the stage carpenters, Thomas Finney by name. They must have quarrelled and separated shortly after, however ; they certainly were not living together, or even on speaking terms, at the end of the year, about which time she left the theatre, and took an engagement at the Adelphi — Finney continuing at the Surrey without intermission till '62.

I had done injustice to Signor Plotski, then, it seemed ; but what had become of

Mr Finney ? He had changed his theatre, but the reigning carpenter knew his address ; and we were *en route* again in half an hour, in quest of his lodgings.

“ Nothing like striking while the iron is hot,” said the lawyer, rubbing his hands. “ We’ll have the case completed before night.”

CHAPTER XVII.

“Is this the man? Is't you, sir, that know things?”
—*Antony and Cleopatra.*

IN a little street near Covent Garden, and after ascending many dingy stairs, we arrived at the abode of Mr Finney, and had the good luck to find that gentleman at home, and in the act of regaling himself solus with his evening meal. He was a short quite elderly man of respectable appearance, sparing of his speech, and, when he did speak, monosyllabic. He had a ruminating eye occasionally flecked with a ray of fun. He was altogether devoid of the “stage business,” which the dramatic outsider so often affects, and had a disinclination to commit himself about trifles that

might almost have attracted notice north of the Tweed.

“Good evening, sir,” said the lawyer, blandly, on entering.

“Evenin’,” said Mr Finney, without rising, but staring like the sphinx, and inserting a huge wedge of soap-like cheese in his mouth.

“And a lovely evening it is,” continued the lawyer, cheerily.

“Aint been hout,” replied the carpenter, thickly, through his cheese.

“You’re Mr Finney, I think?” said my companion.

“Hivery man ’as ’is himpressions,” said Mr Finney, washing down the cheese with a mouthful of beer, but keeping his winkless eye upon us. “Sometimes there kreck—sometimes *not* kreck.”

“Quite true,” smiled my friend, humoringly, “but I *know* you’re Mr Finney.”

“Why do you ask, then?”

“Only for form’s sake, my dear sir.”

“Oh!” and he went on munching and staring, like a cow chewing the cud.

“Mr Thomas Finney, I may say,” continued the lawyer.

“Oh! you know that too, do you?”

“Oh yes! my dear sir, I know that too.”

“Then you don’t want to ask me the question, I expect?”

“No; but I know more about you than you think, Mr Finney.”

“P’raps you’re a hextra clever man?”

“I hope so; it’s my business to be clever.”

“P’raps you know more nor there is to know?”

“Oh no, no!” laughed the lawyer, as though much tickled with Mr Finney’s humour; “but I assure you we know nothing that isn’t to your credit.”

“Don’t you, now?”

"No, indeed, we don't. You've had your misfortunes, of course."

"Of coorse, of coorse."

"But you've got over them all."

"There's no more a-comin', then, I s'pose?"

"My dear sir, let us be serious; I am here as a lawyer."

"That's one misfortin I aint got over, then."

"Ah! Mr Finney, I see you're an incorrigible joker, like all you dramatic gentlemen. Will you answer an honest man a plain question, joking apart, now?"

Finney took a pull at his beer, and replied, "'Oos a-jokin'? I aint, nor this 'ere gent, as I knows on, and I'm not aweer as you've said nuffink hextray comic. I aint larfed, as I knows on. 'Oos a-jokin'?"

"Will you answer a question, then?"

"I aint on my hoath, I s'pose?"

"Certainly not; it's a private question—

all among friends. I only want to see if you can tell me something I know all about already," said the lawyer, rather out-diplomatising himself.

"Ah! I see—it's a k'nundrum; but I give it up—never could make nuffink of them."

The lawyer looked at me in despair.

"I think you had better ask the question straightforwardly," I said; "there is no reason why Mr Finney should object to answer it."

Mr Finney looked perfectly wooden and placid, and browsed away at his bread and cheese.

"Well, then, straightforwardly, Mr Finney, are you a married man?"

"Well, then, straykeforwiggly, I can't tell you."

"That's odd; were you ever married?"

"Yes, I was."

"A widower, perhaps?"

“Mayhap.”

“You don’t know?”

“I don’t know, and I don’t bruise my hoats, and I aint a-goin’ to Rosherville, and I don’t know who’s Griffiths, and, wot’s more, I don’t care; and now, please to tell me wot all this ’ere lark is? Wot are you comin’ a-nigglin’ and a-nagglin’ at me for, and disturbin’ me at my wittles? ’Oo are you, you white-faced cuss?” The manner was as calm as ever, though the words were strong. “I aint a-goin’ to sit hargle-barglin’ with you all night; my time’s hup—it is. ’Oo are you?”—and he rose.

“My good sir, in the cause of law and justice and humanity, answer me a question. I’m a lawyer—Mr Wilkin, of Saville Row. I’m employed in a matrimonial cause. A person is suspected of having committed bigamy; I believe the proof lies with you. Were you married in 1853 to a woman known by the name of Carlotta Seymour?”

The man's face blazed into sudden animation. "Married to her? Yes, I was married to her, the thief! the villain!" and he went on to apply to his spouse a string of epithets of more force than refinement. "And she's committed biggermee, has she? 'Taint a 'angin' bus'ness, I believe—more's the pity. I'd go a 'undred mile on a donkey to see her 'ung."

"No, it's not a hanging business; but you were married to her, and could identify her, could you?"

"Couldn't I, and wouldn't I? But wot will you do to her?—something hextra salt, eh?"

"Oh yes! of course; but our main object, in the first place, is to free a gentleman from his marriage with her; and, by the by, this will enable you to get a divorce, and marry again. You must marry an heiress this time, Mr Finney, eh? Ha! ha!"

"Thankin' you graciously, Tom Finney's

billycock covers T. F.'s family and k'neck-shuns for the fewchure."

"Could you come and assist us to identify her to-morrow?"

"Come? Slippy. I'm your man, hanny time and hannyware."

"To-morrow at twelve. Will you come to the Grosvenor Hotel?"

"See if I don't. But why 'n thunder, Mr Lawyer, coodn't you hout with this at fust, instead of hagitatin' a feller at his wittles? I thought you was a depitation from John Bright or the People's William to get me to make a speech in the Squeer. But I'll come; see if I don't."

"Eureka!" cried the lawyer, as we left Mr Finney's door — "eureka! the case is virtually complete, and Captain Burrige is a free man. The identification is a certainty, of course, and I only go on with it to satisfy Captain Burrige's mind, and enable him to make his arrangements in advance of the

legal formalities that may be necessary. I shall be at the hotel before noon to-morrow, and will bring the lady's address. Then we can go and visit her in a body, and give her an opportunity of comparing the merits of her two husbands—ha! ha!”

“Adolphus, my boy, you're free!” I said, on entering the room, where I found my friend, now fairly done up with anxiety and excitement, lying prostrate on a sofa. He stared at me in a confused way, as if he had been sleeping.

“What d'ye mean? You've not really found the husband?”

“Really found him.”

“And he admits the marriage?”

“Of course he does, and will go with us to-morrow and identify the woman; you're free!”

Burridge rose slowly. “Donald,” he gasped, “I—bless you—you're my good ang——. Holloa! what's this? It's dark

—I'm choking;" and down he fell with a bang on the floor senseless and motionless, in a dead faint.

Now, here was a fellow I had once looked upon as a mere "*natus-consumere-fruges*,"—incapable of emotion, good-natured from laziness, born *blazé*, "*né fatigué*"—here was this large physical man conducting himself in the most appropriately sensational way, disclosing nerves, feelings, affections, and a power of becoming unconscious at the fitting crisis, that would have delighted a dramatic artist. I had, indeed, fathomed Adolphus before, but this last, this fainting phase, brought painfully to my mind the sufferings the simple patient fellow had undergone, not unmingled with a thrill of admiration for the manly Anglo-Saxon nature disdaining to hoist a flag of distress to the world, and only betraying, when relief arrived, how stern had been the ordeal passed through.

He soon came to himself. "I say, Donald,

what the deuce do you go knocking a fellow about for?" was his first question on opening his eyes. "A joke's a joke, but eh? Why? Oh yes! I remember now—ah!——" and with a long gasp of relief he closed his eyes and lay back again. I did not disturb him.

It was a happy evening for both of us, though little was said on either side.

Adolphus sat plunged in meditation, but every now and then a ray of joy like a sun-beam flashed across his face, and he would rise and grasp my hand, and "God-bless" me, "not so much for my own sake, old fellow," he would say—"not so much for myself as for her. A man is stronger—he goes about the world, and has distractions; but a woman—what has a woman got to do but brood over her troubles? Poor Mary! what lines she's had! God bless you, Donald, for her!"

It was in vain to disclaim personal merit,

and point out that I was little more than an accidental instrument.

"Well, Adolphus," I said, "this likeness of ours has, I hope, been the means of bringing about your happiness, and you shall thank me as much as ever you like—that is, thank the likeness, provided it continues to be a good angel, and carries out in my case the good work it has begun; for if it hadn't been for you and it, you know, I should never have met Lady Rose, probably."

"Carry it out, old boy! Of course it will carry it out."

"Ah! I'm not sure of that; I have nothing positive to go on. Lady Rose may have forgotten all about me by this time."

"Forgotten all about you! as if any one could forget the best fellow who ever walked on the earth! Never! I'll stake my life on your being accepted. If you weren't, I'd

follow her about the world and give her no rest. I'd haunt her like a shadow—like somebody's ghost—always saying, 'Be mine! Be mine!'—only I'd say, 'be his, be his!' of course, you know;" and with a hearty laugh at this novel specific for securing the affections of a young lady, we separated for the night in high spirits.

CHAPTER XVIII.

“Such then,” said Una, “as she seemeth here,
Such is the face of Falsehood ; such the sight
Of fowle Duessa, when her borrowed light
Is laid away, and counterfesaunce knowne.”

—SPENSER : *Faerie Queene*.

THE lawyer was with us next day at noon punctually.

“Wish you joy, Captain Burr ridge,” he exclaimed, “with all my heart, I’m sure ; the case is complete, and the identification merely formal, for your own satisfaction ; and it will depend upon yourself whether criminal proceedings are to be instituted against the lady or not.”

“Oh ! hang the proceedings ! I don’t want a row ; let me be quit of her, that’s all.”

"That you shall be, my dear sir—that you shall be. You must nerve yourself for the unpleasantness of confronting her now, however. It will be painful, but, like tooth-drawing, it will soon be over. You will be able to command your feelings, I do trust?"

Burridge, with the morning light, had arrayed himself anew in the profound stolidity of the heavy dragoon, and he answered the attorney with ox-like wonder in his eye. "Painful? it's the jolliest thing I've had to do for seven years, I can tell you."

"Delighted to hear you take that view of it, my dear sir; it will be well that I accompany you, I suppose?"

"Oh! certainly, certainly; and here comes Mr Finney, I suppose," as a knock came to the door.

"A party for Captain Bruce," said the waiter, throwing open the door; and in walked Mr Finney.

“Mornin’, gents hall,” said he, entering slowly, and bearing far in front of him, as if to protect them from collisions, a weather-beaten chimney-pot hat of colossal dimensions, and a green cotton umbrella in complete harmony with it. “A little arter time I am, but I ’ad to spiff myself hup a bit arter the shop, along o’ goin’ into lady’s s’ciety, you see.”

“Plenty of time, Mr Finney, plenty of time; won’t you sit down?” said the lawyer. And after a good deal of manœuvring with his hat and umbrella, Mr Finney brigaded them together in a strongly-intrenched position under his chair, and then coolly surveyed the company with a twinkling eye.

“Wich is ’im?” he said, at last. “One on ’em’s ’im, in coorse, but wich is t’other? Wich on ’em kem to my shop last night? Blarmed if I iver see sich a pair o’ Corksican Brothers. My guv’nor ’d give ’em an ’atfull; see if he didn’t.”

"This is Captain Bruce, who visited you last night," said the lawyer; "and this is Captain Burr ridge, whom you're going to make a free man of, Mr Finney."

"My sarvice to you, sir," said Mr Finney, nodding to Adolphus with a comical expression. "'Ow's our old 'ooman?"

"What do you mean?" said Burr ridge.

"'Ow's our wife? We're a joink-stock company, aint we? Finney & Co.? 'Ow's our missus, Co.? There aint another pardner in the consarn, is there?"

"No, I don't think so," said Burr ridge, stolidly; "but I haven't seen Mrs Finney for six years."

"Oh! you split too, did you? Now, if I may ax the freedom, wot was it?"

"What?"

"Wot was the split on?"

"Oh! hundreds of causes, Mr Finney."

"Ah! she wor a one, warn't she, now? She wor a one to worrit the 'ind leg hoff a

jackass, and, 'scews in' freedom, she found two on 'em ; didn't she now, Co. ? ”

“ That she did, Mr Finney.”

“ She lived 'igh, she did,” said the carpenter, surrendering himself to a train of conjugal reminiscences. “ She worn't a cheap bargain, no 'ow ; and livin' 'igh gave 'er a nigh temper ; and the swearink of her !—horffle ! and the lyin' thief she wor ! ow-daycious, surey-lie ! She wos the Princiss Pofflepowski in her hown right ; but in disguidge, warn't she ? I 'unted up the Hemp'ror, her father. He 'ad a fancy for cobblin' and livin' in Shoreditch, and puttin' a sign hover his palass door—‘ Peter Mole, Boots and Shoes.’ Ah ! she wor a kweer one, and no mistake ! ” And Mr Finney indulged in a saturnine laugh.

“ Jest afore we wor married,” he went on — “ blowed if it don't bust me still—she says to me, ‘ Thomas,’ says she in her 'igh way, ‘ you must 'old up your 'ead after we're

married.' 'So I will,' says I; 'I allus did.' 'You must 'old it 'igher than iver now, then,' says she; 'do you know wot you're a-goin' to be, Thomas?' 'Third carpinter at the Surrey,' says I; 'and fust chop by-and-by, please the pigs,' says I. 'Gnoble thought!' says she, throwin' hout her arm; 'in my country, when a princess marries a pessink, the pessink becomes a prince. You're a-goin' to be a prince, my Thomas,' says she. 'In disguidge, though?' says I. 'In disguidge for the presint,' says she. 'Then they won't go a-prayin' for me with the rest of the royal family, belike?' says I. 'Not for the presint,' says she; 'but by-and-by you'll get that, and hall other emoly-mints.' Oh Lor! 'ow she did carry on—surey-lie!" And Mr Finney punctuated his reflection with a little laugh.

"I wor an 'angin' horff and hon a bit, you see," he explained; "and she thought she'd nail me up and screw me down by makin'

me a prince! and arter hall, I was hass enough to marry her; but so were you, Co., my boy—so there's two on us, any'ow. Scews my freedom, gents hall."

"By Jove!" said Burrige, "that little game about the Princess is Carlotta all over—that identifies her; but if we are going to see her, hadn't we better start and get it over?"

It was agreed to, and we started in a couple of hansoms for Gerard Street, Soho, where the "joink-stock" wife was now living. Burrige and the lawyer went in one cab, and Mr Finney and I in the second.

"Oh Lor!" remarked that gentleman, as he settled in his seat, after breaking his nut-brown hat against the roof,—“Oh Lor! to think of me a-ridin' in a nandsom with a tip-topper in a tagglioni and a higlass—oh Lor!” We pulled up at the corner of the street. Now was the tug of war.

"We'd better all go into the house," said the lawyer; "but Mr Finney can remain

outside the room till he's wanted. Tell Mrs Burridge," he said to the servant who opened the door, "that the solicitor would like to see her for a few minutes, if she's disengaged." Permission being given, we ascended, and Adolphus entered the room first. There was a cry of astonishment, and as I followed him in, a large, flabby, middle-aged woman, with a fishy eye, hanging white jowlers, and a towzy head of withered-looking hair, was crossing the room in stage-strides, with extended arms.

"Oh, my long-lost one!" she exclaimed, stopping, however, in her march, when she saw me; "oh, mee husband of mee youth! The quality of mercy is not strained, it drop-pop-pop" (she began to sob) "pop-eth as the gee-entle dee-ew! It blesseth him that gives! It shall bless me! I forgive you, mee erring one! mee perr-rodigal! To your place! to your home, in mee arms! mee Adol-ol-olphus, come!"

This scene was quite too overpowering. I bit my tongue and pinched my arm—hurt myself seriously, in fact, to suppress the bursting laughter. As for Dolly, his sense of humour was not quickly touched; besides, it was different for him, and he looked phlegmatically at the woman, and quietly remarked, “Certainly not; sit down, please. I have some business to talk about; this is my solicitor.”

“You do not come, then, to sue for mer-r-ey, for par-rdon for this long ke-ruel desertion?”

“Not at all, and, what’s more, you know I haven’t; so please to leave off stage-tricks till we’re gone.”

“Unmanly miscreant! I will not deign,” (with an imperial sweep of the arm), “to hold commune with you; to the door, sir! and you, too, myrmidons!” (to the solicitor and me) “begone!”

“We’ll go immediately, ma’am; we just

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want you quietly to acknowledge your marriage, to save trouble," said the lawyer.

"How can I deny it? His ker-ramping fetters are about mee harrt; and now, be-gone!"

"I mean your previous marriage," said the lawyer, quietly.

The woman's eyes dilated; she clutched the table, gave a quick short gasp, and her suety complexion faded (if the word is admissible) into an ashen hue. She recovered her self-possession almost instantly, however, and cried out,—

"Ah! ha! a plot to rob me of my pitance; in sooth, 'tis worthy of him."

"My good madam," said the lawyer, "this is really quite useless. We know you were married in the year 1853. Better to acknowledge it to us privately than go to a court about it with—with certain painful results."

"If you will tear the gnawing secret from

my breast—my outraged breast—so be it. A foul *mesalliance* I did contract, in pique, in very madness, womanlike, to spite a slighting noble—I *did* mate me with a clown.”

“That was in ’53?” said the lawyer, his cool dry voice contrasting strangely with the tragic rhythm of her sentences.

“In ’53 it was, but ’54 brought healing on its wings. The monster died, and left me free once more,” and she buried her face in her hands.

“You’re sure he died?”

“Ay, very sure,” she gurgled between her hands.

“His name was Finney, I believe?”

“Spare me; suffice it that the monster’s dead.”

The lawyer quietly opened the door and admitted the carpenter, Carlotta’s face continuing buried in her hands. Finney’s mouth was distended into a wide grin.

“His name was Thomas Finney, carpen-

ter at the Surrey Theatre, I think?" repeated the lawyer.

"Ask me no more," hissed the woman ;
"suffice it that the carpenter is dead !"

"The carpenter 'as hoverlooked the suc-
c'mstance if he is," said Finney, in a hollow
voice.

The woman dropped her hands, and a
real shriek of anguish and fear rang through
the house.

"An apparition !" she gasped, sitting
down and holding her hands to her side—
"a ghost ! he must be dead ! I swear I
thought him dead !" and she rocked herself
to and fro. "It's a cheat, a trick, a lie ;
it's not the man," she went on, wildly.
"Who says it's the man ? who dares to
say it's he ? he died in '54."

"Well, he must 'ave dug 'isself up agin,
old 'ooman—that's all. You recleck you
kem to 'is shop in '55, and got a fippun
note from him, which it aint costumary

to get from any ghosts I've heerd tell on ; and the nex time you kem—a year arter—you wos tight, you recleck, and he turned you hout and called a peeler ; so he wor above-ground then, and he's not been a-dyin' much lately, as he's aweer on, and, wot's more, don't mean to."

"Is that your wife, Mr Finney?" said the lawyer.

"That's the 'ooman I took for my wife in '53—worse luck. Lor! but she's haltered since then. More like a hox than a hangel now, surey-lie!"

"I think it's cruel to prolong this scene," said I ; "we're all satisfied—let us go."

Carlotta looked up, with ghastly despair in her face, and said to Burrige,—

"You will go and rejoice over the downfall of a miserable woman, I suppose, and set the law on to her, and starve and imprison her. You suppose that she has no feelings, and that if she committed this

breach of the law she wasn't driven to it by a foolish mad passion for you—weak dotard that she was. You will have no pity, I suppose; weak men, when they have an accidental triumph, are vindictive. It flatters them—it makes them feel strong to trample down somebody—and to trample down the fallen is their only chance.”

“Hush!” replied Adolphus,—“these fine words are entirely thrown away upon me. I won't trample on you, but I won't pity you. You never loved me; you had a mad passion for my money, that was all. I may be weak, but not weak enough not to know that. As for the law, as far as I am concerned, it shan't be let loose on you. You are free to go where you please, but I advise you to leave this country, as the law may find you out without my assistance. If you were starving, I *might* pity you; but as I don't wish to pity you, you

shall have enough to keep you from starving—but only from starving. That's all."

"I say, guv'nor, aint you going to lag her for biggermee?" said Mr Finney, in accents of deep disappointment.

"No, no, no," said the lawyer; "come away, come away."

"Oh Lor! oh Lor! to think of an 'ole blessed day lost for nuffink! It aint friendly of you, Co.; 'taint, now, old man."

Disregarding Mr Finney's pathetic remonstrances, we left the miserable woman to herself.

"I congratulate you again, Captain Burridge," cried the lawyer, "and all the more, now that I have seen the fate from which you have been rescued. You need now give yourself no further trouble about the matter; I will take an opinion as to the most proper legal steps to be adopted, and will arrange everything, if possible, without troubling you again. I understand—par-

don me—ahem!—I understand that certain ulterior arrangements were depending on this most fortunate discovery; well, *the event* should be delayed till you hear from me, but, in the mean time, all arrangements can be proceeded with. It will be a matter of a few weeks at the utmost, and perhaps no delay may be necessary. Of that I will inform you by letter, however, without loss of time. And I suppose I had better arrange to have Whytock released from the police office?"

"Certainly, if you can manage it."

"No difficulty about that; and as to the sum of money promised him by Captain Bruce?"

"Whatever was promised he must get, of course; for, no matter how, he has been of the utmost service, and has earned the money according to the contract. Good-bye."

"Adoo, Cap'n," said Mr Finney; "the

pardnership's broke hup. Finney & Co.'s took down the sign, and if there's to be no laggin', my name's Walker. 'Taint the right thing, though, no 'ow; she'll be at it agin. I'll 'ave 'arf-a-dozen new pardners. Better say 'lag,' Cap'n!"

"I don't think she's likely to find any new victims now, Mr Finney," said Adolphus; "I think we may safely let her alone. But you've lost a day's work for me, and you've done me a great service, and I should like to make you an acknowledgment: what can I do for you?"

"Nothink at all, sir; nothink at all. But if ever your watchword 'appens to be 'lag,' T. F. is the carpenter to nail the bisness for you. Mornin', gents hall," and Mr Finney stalked gravely down the street.

"Now, my dear Donald," said Adolphus when we were alone,—“now that the curtain's dropped on villany and misery, and all the rest of it, now for happiness. 'Strike

while the iron is hot,' as the lawyer said. You've still got four days' leave; come along to Aldershot, and steer me and yourself to victory."

"Ah! to victory! but is it to be victory for me? Happy events are rare enough in the world, but happy coincidences, how often do they happen?"

"What an old croaker you are!—the moment I begin to be jolly, you damp it by tumbling into the blues. You talk like an ass, Donald; you talk as if the whole affair was a matter of chance, like each of us winning a fortune at roulette on the same day. From what you told me, Lady Rose as good as promised; and, between you and me, you ought to have settled it on the spot. If she meant to take you, she would have done it then as much as now; why didn't you speak out like a man?"

"Mrs Badger came just as I was going

to say—to say what I really think I *was* going to say.”

“Why didn’t you say it before Mrs Badger came, then? I’ve often heard it said that you clever fellows don’t get on half so well with women as we thickheads do. Upon my word, I believe it’s true; and I suspect it’s because you crane at your fences, and want to take them artistically, turning back and back for a new take-off, instead of cramming in the spurs and going slap at them, no matter where, never mind how, so long as you get over. You treat them—women, I mean—like muses, or goddesses, or sylphs, or something, and won’t speak to them like human beings. Hang it all! they *are* human beings, you know. But courage! Lady Rose—I’ll answer for her.”

“*Variū et mutabile semper*——”

“Oh! bother the dead languages! keep your spirits up, and don’t let us spend the night talking metaphysics in Soho. Come on.”

CHAPTER XIX.

“ Ah ! one rose,
One rose, but one by those fair fingers culled,
Were worth a hundred kisses pressed on lips
Less exquisite than thine.”

—TENNYSON.

WE spent that evening together in the room in the Barracks at Aldershot, where Burridge and I had, some three months before, first formed our momentous acquaintance. “What an age it seemed!” was the idea that occurred to both of us; “And to think,” said Dolly, that we should have only known each other three months! Wonderful, isn’t it? considering that, I’ll be bound, there are no two fellows such pals in camp, or anywhere.”

“Human life is properly to be measured

by a reference to the number and intensity of our emotions, rather than by any arithmetical computation of days and years," said I, sententiously.

"Now that's the kind of thing—I'll be bound that's exactly the kind of aggravating thing—you go saying to Lady Rose. Why, my dear fellow, it's enough to frighten the Pope. Please stow away all that sort of nonsense in your portmanteau till after to-morrow, or woe betide you. And, talking of to-morrow, Donald, what is our scheme—our plan of attack?"

"Well, there are two or three things to be taken into consideration. The ladies are both at the Hermitage, you're certain?"

"Quite."

"It won't do to take Miss Richmond too much by surprise, you see. She must be prepared for it gently."

"Ah! who's to do it?"

"I was thinking of a little plan; if you

approve of it, I think it would suit all parties concerned very well. It is, that we should both go over to F—— in the morning, but that you should wait at the hotel, while I go the house, see Lady Rose, tell her all about it, and consult with her as to the best means of breaking the news to her cousin ; and then, when the fitting moment arrives, we shall send for you, and introduce the hero on to the stage.”

“ Ah ! I see, Master Donald ; you’re a sly hand. You’re going to take our little affairs as a text, and preach your own sermon on it, with a practical application ; but, with all my heart, provided the sermon isn’t too long, and you don’t keep me waiting an age outside paradise. Success to the sermon, old boy, and I’m sure it will be successful.”

When we separated for the night, I perceived that my feelings closely resembled those of another night when I believed my-

self to be approaching the crisis of my fate. I perceived that I was going to be troublesome, so I shook myself together, and said, "No good tormenting yourself—hopes or fears will be certainties to-morrow, for to-morrow the die shall be cast;" and, so saying, I tumbled into bed, grateful for an overpowering fatigue which I felt sure would bring immediate sleep and escape from thought. And sleep did come, but it came wild and feverish, as on the memorable night after my introduction to Lady Rose.

Vivid images and visions, suggested by a medley of hopes and fears, and coloured by the strange events of the last three days, chased each other about my brain, interchanging and blending with a marvellous rapidity.

Now there was a vision of a fair face smiling gently upon me—a vision of a fair hand offering me a promised guerdon—a

vision of a fair form clasped—and I felt a beating heart that required no other voice to give its happy verdict. Anon the same fair face, bright with mischievous mirth, and a musical voice that rang out elfin laughter, and cried, “Too late; the chance was thine, but now ’tis mine—the roses all are dead.” Through the livelong night this infernal jingle held possession of my fevered brain. Now and then I woke up, and, as if to exorcise the demon suggesting the evil refrain, roared out, “To-morrow the die shall be cast.” In vain—back it came, spoken now by Burr ridge, now by Badger, now by Lady Rose. It was set to music at last, and Tom Finney and Bill Whytock sung it over a pot-house table, to the air of the “Guards’ Waltz,” clinking their glasses and waving long white clay pipes to the time, while the irresistible Kartoffel of Bagdad danced strenuously in the midst,—

“With a hip, hip, hip, hurrah !
With a hip, hip, hip, hurrah !
They’re dead, they’re dead,
They’re dey—dey—dead,
The Roses all are dead !”

At last I woke up to find my friend standing by my bedside.

“What are you holloaing at ?” he inquired. “Who’s dead ?”

“They are—the Roses—all of them,” I replied, dimly. “Oh ! hang it ! I forgot. I must have been dreaming—such abominable dreams, too. Is it time to get up ?”

“Up you get. It’s eight o’clock. You look as if you’d been dissipating ; jump into your bath—sharp. Remember what’s before us. It’s a glorious morning.”

It was indeed a glorious morning, and if bright skies are happy omens, better omen I could not wish. Thinking on this wise, I could not help murmuring, as we rode along on our way to F——

“ Go not, happy day,
From the shining fields ;
Go not, happy day,
Till the maiden yields.

When the happy yes
Falters from her lips,
Pass, and blush the news
O'er the blowing ships,

Till the Red man dance ——”

Adolphus, up to this point, had regarded me with mute disapprobation, but here he broke in,—

“ Oh Donald ! for heaven's sake stop ! if that's the key you're in, it's all up ; lay all that sort of thing aside, and put the spurs in, or I know one Red man who won't dance to-night.”

“ Don't be afraid, old boy ; I'll be prudent, and, as you say, ‘ put the spurs in.’ I suppose you've never been along this road before, Adolphus ? ”

“ To tell you the truth, then, I have. I didn't go as long as you were here ; I didn't

think it right. But after you were away, I could not stand the kind of feeling of being cut off from her altogether—you were a kind of link, you know—so I rode over one evening and put up my horse, and cruised about till I found the Hermitage, and since that I've been over there every evening. I've been leading an owl's life; my life hasn't begun till twilight for the last month. I know all the windows, and all the family moves. Sometimes I was in luck, and saw Mary before the drawing-room blinds were down; sometimes it was only her shadow I saw, but that was always something. Sometimes a thing that looked like a big cauliflower, from its shadow, used to be in the window all the evening, nodding and wagging itself up and down. I found out at last that it was Mrs Badger's head, asleep; and how I used to grind my teeth when I saw it was going to be a cauliflower night! Once, and only once, the two girls came out

in the moonlight, and walked on the grass in front. I was screwed in between a tree and the wall, and could see them safely. She was looking glorious."

"Which of them?" I cried, eagerly.

"Which of them? ha! ha! ha!—I like that. Well, both of them, of course, but I had only eyes for one, and I saw she had on the locket—saw it with my own eyes. That was a great night for me. One night they left the drawing-room window open. There was music first and then talking, and I thought I would like to hear her voice, so I got on the wall and crept close up to the house, and was hearing her splendidly, when somehow I slipped and fell off into a bush with an awful crash. Luckily I was hurt, and lay still, for, in a moment after, an old fellow put his head out and holloaed, 'Who was there?' and 'That he was going to fire,' and 'That he saw me perfectly well, and I had better give myself up before he drilled



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"She was looking glorious"

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a hole in me.' I deuced near *did* give myself up, but I didn't; and the old fellow, who hadn't seen me a bit, got tired by degrees, and went away. I got a fright, but I had heard her voice; and that was my best night, I think."

"This is the first view we get of the place," said I, drawing rein, as we reached the top of the long hill. "There it is!" and I recognised with a thrill of blissful recollections the dark wood that encompassed the town.

The roses of the early summer had faded from the hedgerow—the roses that, for me, had lifted up their voices and spoken; but fresher than ever was their revelation now. And 'there is a Rose,' thought I, 'that blooms all the year round; courage, she shall be mine!' "Come on, Adolphus, quicker, and let us get rid of suspense."

We galloped along the turf till we reached the outskirts of the town, and I then said,

"Ride on now, Adolphus, and go quickly past the house ; I'll come or send for you when you're wanted."

"Good luck ! good speed ! and don't keep me long waiting, for I'm an impatient beggar," he replied, and clattered away up the street.

I gave him a short start, and then, literally following his often-repeated advice, I "put the spurs in," and in a couple of minutes stood, with a ringing in my ears and a thumping of the heart, in front of the door—the door—waiting with a wild inconsistent sort of hope that, when the servant opened it, he would say, "Not at home."

Not so, however ; the man welcomed me with a broad grin, widened, doubtless, by the memory of frequent largesses, and a "lively sense of benefits to come."

He informed me that his master was gone to town as usual, that Mrs Badger was "hout in the pony-carriage," but that the young

ladies were, he believed, within—would I walk up? I would and did—and marched into the drawing-room in a state of numb desperation.

It was empty. “I’ll go and see for the ladies,” said the man.

In a couple of minutes, which seemed as many hours—and during which I had mastered, with intense avidity, a fact from ‘The Times’ that Foster’s “Mountain Port” was the only possible stimulant a sane man should think of imbibing—the man returned.

“Miss Mary has gone for a walk, sir,” he said; “but her ladyship” (I thought the villain’s eyes twinkled) “is in the garden; will you please to go there, or shall I let her ladyship know you’re here, sir?”

“Oh! I’ll go to the garden, certainly,” said I; and I rather flattered myself my tone was careless and jaunty. Here was the very opportunity required. It was beauti-

ful. It was something like luck. There was a symmetry in it, a——. And yet I found myself taking the most circuitous route to the garden, slinking behind trees, and, in fact, conducting myself more like a footpad than an ardent lover hastening to pay his *devoirs*. Confound it! why hadn't I Burridge's facility, who proposed when he didn't want to propose—when he had no right to propose?

The garden, however, was inexorably but two acres in extent, so unless I went away altogether, or got up a tree, I must clearly fall in with Lady Rose before long. "Forward, craven!" I muttered to myself, and started off slowly and warily down a path which, leading to the hotbeds and the depot of garden debris, was least of all likely to lead me to the fair object of my mission.

The stern reader will perhaps say, "What an ass!" Well, it is easy to say, "ass;" but wait till you've tried it yourself, and if

you have, and still say "ass," all I can say is, you must either be a heavy dragoon, or admit that the same epithet was once applicable to yourself.

Be all this as it may, I had only gone a few yards down the path, when——

"Captain Bruce! it is Captain Bruce!" cried a musical voice, which, however, seemed to set a thousand wild bells jangling in my head. I started and turned, and there, a little off the path, beside a plot of standard roses, in the act of tending them, stood their patron saint—beautiful as some poet's dream of the Golden Age—the Lady Rose herself.

"This is indeed a surprise!" she said, advancing, and shaking hands with me; "and where *have* you dropped from?"

"From Aldershot," I replied, feeling stunned and stupid; "for a few days."

"Oh! my uncle never told us you were coming for a visit; he has been keeping it for a surprise, I suppose."

"I beg your pardon, I have not come for a visit, I'm sorry to say."

"I thought you said you had come for a few days."

"To Aldershot, I meant."

"Oh! well, it is very kind of you to come over to see us; I'm afraid my aunt is out, but if you can stay for luncheon, I think you will see her; she will be back, I think. My uncle is in London, of course; he will be very sorry to have missed you."

A sort of chill fell upon me at these words—at this suggestion of its being possible for *me* to be at Aldershot *without* coming over to see *her*—of its being possible for me *not* to stay for luncheon—of its being possible for me *not* to see her uncle; there was a matter-of-factness about it that damped me—almost piqued me—I who had pictured myself as being there without intermission, from morn to dewy eve, for the next three days.

"I hope your uncle and aunt are very well?" I said, in a damped voice.

"Very well, thanks."

"And your cousin?"

"Extremely so; better than she has been all this summer, I'm happy to say, and in great spirits at the prospect of her trip to Ireland. Papa arrives to-night, you must know, to take us both back with him the day after to-morrow."

"Oh!" thought I, "it's all up, then. *She* is perfectly happy, that is clear, and her cousin has got over the Burridge-disappointment. I might as well have stayed away. Burridge and I are both done for—both of us."

"And you are glad to go back to Ireland, Lady Rose?" I said, in a hollow voice.

"Glad? of course I am; I am *very* fond of my uncle and aunt—very; but I confess I was getting just a little tired of this place. Then, you know, I have domestic affections,

and a great many brothers and sisters to exercise them on, and all my friends are on the other side of the channel; and I'm patriotic, and fond of the Green Isle, particularly at this time of year, when the gay season is going to begin; and—and I don't like stagnation, and one does begin to feel a little like a vegetable, after three or four months of an English village; so, altogether, I am quite pleased, as you may imagine."

Her airy volubility and gay manner completely crushed me.

"How is dear Captain Crosstree?" she went on.

"D—n dear Captain Crosstree," I thought, —commanding myself, however, to reply that the pony's health was good.

"Have you many nice rides near—near—where you are now?"

She didn't even know where I was quartered, then! Oh miserable fool that I had been!

"No," I replied, almost savagely, "there is nothing nice there. I loathe it—it's worse even than Aldershot!"

She started, and looked at me quickly, changing colour; she saw something was wrong, I suppose, and said gently, "I didn't know you disliked Aldershot so much."

Now was my chance—now, now, now: but no, I was dashed—I had no spring left in me—no rally (call me an ass, now, if you like)—and only answered coldly, "Aldershot is not generally liked in the army, you know."

"So I believe."

Then we were both silent, and walked on round the garden; on—on.

The dismal silence continued. Lady Rose began to look offended—did look offended. As for me, I was as savage as a bear. Our pace quickened as our tempers rose, I suppose, and at last we simultaneously awoke to the fact that we had

walked twice round the garden, at the rate of four and a half miles an hour, without speaking a word. The situation was sufficiently ludicrous, but I, at least, was in no laughing humour ; and Lady Rose only said, "As we are not walking for a wager, Captain Bruce, suppose we go a little slower, unless, perhaps, you're tired, and would like to go into the house."

"Thanks, no," I said, "not at all ; but I'm afraid I am not a very amusing companion. Perhaps I had better relieve you of my stupidity and go back to camp."

"I don't know what has happened, I'm sure," cried Lady Rose, in a tone of real distress. "You seem to be offended with me ; what have I done ? We used to be friends ; tell me what I have done."

Her voice was kind and gentle again, and her manner was an olive-branch in itself ; and I replied, mollified but hopeless,—

"Nothing at all, I assure you ; I'm stupid,

I know. I'm agitated, in fact, because I have come to tell you something that—that agitates me, and will agitate you."

Again the bright colour flushed into her face, and her eyes became larger and more lustrous as she looked fixedly at me for one moment, and then drooped them, speaking not a word.

"Do you remember our last conversation, Lady Rose?" I said, after a pause.

"Yes, I remember it," she said, still looking down, and speaking very low.

"Then—then I have come to tell you what I suppose will now be indifferent to your cousin, however."

"Oh! what is that?" she cried, eagerly.

"I suppose," I continued, in a voice of the deepest gloom—"I suppose the delicate matter of which we spoke is now quite uninteresting to her?"

"Uninteresting to her! Why so?"

It might have puzzled the Seven Sages,

certainly, to tell how I had arrived at that conclusion, and I replied, somewhat abashed,—

“No matter; I had fancied so, I cannot tell why.”

“Uninteresting to her! No, it is everything to her. She has been bearing her troubles beautifully, indeed—with a wonderful patience; and latterly she has seemed far more hopeful and cheerful; but I am convinced—I know—that all the happiness of her life is bound up in this sad mysterious affair. Have you any ray of hope to give her?—to give us?”

“Not a mere ray of hope, Lady Rose,—I have come to announce the full sunrise of their happiness. The clouds are dispelled; the difficulties have faded away. They are free!”

“Free! and you have done this? you? Oh, Captain Bruce! what shall I do? what shall I say to you? This is too much hap-

piness—but how? Tell me, oh, tell me again, that it is so!”

“It is so, indeed, Lady Rose; and a great happiness it is to me to know it is so, and to bring you the news. I have been an instrument, certainly, and, I need not say, a zealous one; but we have more reason to thank the extraordinary likeness between Captain Burridge and myself, than anything else. I have *much* to thank that likeness for; but will you sit down here in the shade, and I will tell you?”

And I told her the whole story, and I made it as long as possible; and I would have liked to tell her it over and over again, that I might have sat and looked into the heaven of her face, seen her bright eyes beaming with happiness and excitement, and heard her sweet voice breathing praise and gratitude to me.

In vain were all my disclaimers. I was the deliverer—the good angel—and none but I.

I had saved her cousin—I had saved my friend. It was noble of me. She would never forget it all her life ; and so I found myself the hero of the hour.

“But,” she said, suddenly, “we ought to go in and tell Mary, ought we not?”

Then I told her that Burridge was in the town, and waiting to be sent for.

“Shall we,” I said, “let him be his own herald, and tell her himself that their troubles are over?”

“It would be delightful—it would be more than delightful : but no ; I fear it might be too much for her. You shall go and bring him, and I will prepare her. I am in a fever of curiosity to see him ; is he really so like you?”

“Yes, Lady Rose, he is really so like. We shall be obliged to tie ribbons of different colours on our arms, or you will be mistaking us.”

“I don’t believe I shall.”

"What colour shall Captain Burridge have?"

"Oh! he must wear Mary's colour, of course—blue."

"And I, Lady Rose? what shall I have?"

"Oh! you must study your own taste," she said, blushing.

"Then it shall be rose!" I cried.

"I don't admire your taste; come, let us go and make Mary happy."

"Not yet, Lady Rose,—not yet, I implore you! Look at this—this withered flower. You gave it to me—you gave it to me. It is dead and withered now; but with it you gave me a hope that is full of life. My hope has lived on these dead leaves, and I on it. Do you remember your promise?"

"I—I promised you—a flower," she faltered, looking down; "and you shall have it. You shall choose one for yourself."

"And when I choose it—and my choice is easily made—I shall read its language as

your own ; I said I would—I warned you that I would. Give me that rosebud in your hand, dear Rose, and say I may.” Rose turned away her beautiful head ; the hand that clasped the rosebud fell by her side, but gently yielded up its treasure.

CHAPTER XX.

“There’s a double sweetness in double rhymes,
And a double at whist and a double ‘Times’

In profit are certainly double.

By doubling, the hare contrives to escape ;
And all seamen delight in a doubled Cape

And a double-reefed topsail in trouble.

But double wisdom and pleasure and sense,
Beauty, respect, strength, comfort, and thence

Through whatever the list discovers,
They are all in the double blessedness summed
Of what was formerly double-drummed,

The marriage of two true lovers.”

—HOOD.

THE sun passed away from over the great elm-tree under which we sat—passed away and far down on his westward journey—and still we did not move, or mark the flight of time. These moments that come but once a life—moments in hours, and hours in moments—are isolated by emotion from

the rest of existence. In them, and in them alone, are the two consenting souls cut off from all else besides. For them time stands still, the past and the future are annihilated, memories and hopes and fears are dead, so intense, so exquisite this concentration on the present.

Poor Mary! Poor Adolphus! What were their waitings, their anxieties, their joys to us? All forgotten. That engrossing solicitude for them, what had become of it, then? Was it only a veil that *had* taken the shape of the covered statue—cast aside, forgotten, and neglected when the hour had come and the revelation had been made? It looked too like it. Hours had passed, and I am sure the pair of whom we had made such a tragedy had never crossed the thoughts of either.

“Upon my life, now, it’s true, my little darling—never slept a wink—couldn’t, you know—hated everything—hated everybody

—hated myself—like poison—looked at my pistols now and then—thought I'd shoot myself, you know—didn't though—because I thought, while there's life there's hope—something's safe to turn up, and I'll marry my little angel after all."

These were the first sounds from the outer world that broke upon our reverie. We started up.

"What is that?" cried Rose.

"Hush! look," I said, "we are forestalled;" for there, on the other side of a tall row of shrubs behind our resting-place, slowly passing down the walk, were Burridge and Mary. His arm was round her waist, and her bright sunny face was looking up into his with an expression of ineffable content.

"We must have been here for hours," I said, "although it seems but a moment. We had forgotten all about our poor friends. What a shame! but all's well that ends

well, and I daresay they will easily forgive us."

"He is not a bit like you," said Rose; "and I shall quarrel with any one who says he is. His voice is so slow and drawling, too. I don't think I am going to be very fond of him, do you know. I wonder how he found his way in."

"He has been giving you a silent serenade every night for the last month—a song without words—without an air either, by the by; so he knew his way as well as I do."

"Oh the horrid prying creature!"

"Yet I would have done the same in his place; and when you found it out, you would have forgiven me, would you not?"

"Perhaps."

At this moment (both her hands were in mine, and—well, never mind) I was aware of a female figure that looked for a moment through the bushes, gave a slight scream, and vanished.

"My aunt!" cried Rose. "Dreadful! what *will* she think?"

"She won't have long for reflection, at any rate; in half an hour we will unfold the dreadful tale. And now I wish you would take me to the greenhouse where I was with you the *first* day, when you gave me the geranium, you remember. I want to compare my present feelings with my past, to look at the rosebud and think of the geranium. By the by, that flower made me very unhappy. Why did you give it to me? and why did you laugh so?"

"Never mind, I am never going to smile again; and I think what you have done to-day justifies the gift. Do you know you have lost all my respect now, and actually forfeited your national character?"

"How?"

"Why, you have committed yourself."

"And you have become a Scotchwoman to-day, *d'avance*."

"I don't see it."

"Yes, you have—you gave me an indirect answer."

"Shall I retract it?"

And, thus talking and laughing, we passed into the greenhouse, where we had not long been when we heard voices outside.

"Bless me, Badger! is that you?"

"Yes, Mrs Badger, me it is."

"Oh Lord! I've got such a turn."

"So have I; what's turned *you* up?"

"Oh heavens!—such a surprise—such a——. Oh Lor! *that* Captain Bruce, what do you think? under the elm-tree, there—over there—go and look at them. He and Rose—such goings on! Kissing, Badger!—kissing, I declare!"

"Bruce and who?" roared Badger.

"Rose."

"Rose! nonsense — you're dreaming. Why, down there, beside the waterfall, I'll

be hanged if he isn't there, this blessed minute, with Mary! and as for kissing and hugging, isn't he just?"

"But it wasn't Mary."

"But it was, and it wasn't Rose."

"But it was."

"Then all I've got to say, old lady, is, that you'd better make yourself scarce, or he'll be at *you* next; nothing will stop a fellow of that sort if he once begins."

I thought this a good moment for a *coup de théâtre*; so, taking Rose by the hand, I led her out, and confronted the old couple.

"Here he is," shouted Badger.

"Here I am, Mr Badger; how are you? here's 'the impostor;' how are you, Mrs Badger?"

"Wh-wh-wh-what does it mean, sir? What are you up to? what's your game, eh, sir?" stammered the stockbroker.

"Matrimonial, Mr Badger; we're engaged to be married,—wish us joy."

"The devil! to how many of them are you engaged?"

"Only to one. Lady Rose has made me very happy; I'm quite satisfied with one, I assure you."

"Very moderate, I'm sure. And the other, sir? what the devil do you mean to do with her? *I* saw you—with my own eyes—at the waterfall—ten minutes ago—what is she to be? A spiritual wife is it, or what? Mind you this aint Mormon country. Explain yourself, sir."

"So I will, in three words: the happy man at the waterfall is my double."

"Whew!" whistled Badger, incredulously; "and you carry out your resemblance by both getting engaged to be married on the same day—in the same garden—to first cousins—he to a girl he never saw before. It won't wash, sir! it won't wash!"

"Nonsense, uncle," said Rose; "listen to

Captain Bruce ; he'll tell you the story. Do, Donald, quickly."

"The story is rather a long and rather an intricate one, but I will give it you as shortly as I can, so that you may at least understand that I'm not a Mormon."

And so I did, the worthy couple all agape the while, and Mr Badger shaking, from time to time, the framework of the greenhouse, with portentous cataracts of laughter. When my little *resumé* was concluded, there was quite a *tableau* ; Mrs Badger embracing her niece, and weeping great round East-end tears of happiness and excitement. Again and again were her brawny arms tossed into the air, and again and again was poor Rose enveloped in their constrictorial circle. As for Badger the exuberant—my arms, wrists, and hands still fell stiff and sore when I think of the worthy fellow's congratulations. He literally put me on the rack, only paus-

ing now and then to cheer away like a whole election mob.

“There’s no other fellow,” he cried, “no other fellow I should have liked half so well. I wish you could marry ’em both ; you deserve them both—don’t he, Mrs Badger—don’t he ?”

“Oh ! Mr Badger,” I cried, “you are far too flattering ; you have been so kind to me all along, that I never can sufficiently thank you ; and now, if anything *can* add to my great happiness, it is this crowning kindness of yours—this hearty welcome.”

“You deserve it, my boy—you deserve it. John Badger is not the man to give it if you didn’t. But, I say, what kind of a fellow is Number Two ? Candidly, now, aint he a bit of a flat ?”

“He’s the best fellow in the world, and you’ll like him far better than me,—but holloa ! hush ! here they come ;” for at this moment Burridge and Mary hove in sight.

They did not observe us at first, but when they did, Mary started and stopped; Burridge, on the contrary, merely withdrew his arm with great deliberation from her waist, and employing the hand so disengaged in fixing his eyeglass in his eye, advanced with perfect *sang froid*, stolidly regarding our group.

"He's a cool hand, anyhow," muttered Badger.

I went forward and shook hands with Mary, whispering "a thousand congratulations;" then turning, I said, "Mr Badger, let me present to you my double, Captain Burridge."

"Glad to see you *again*, sir," said Badger, "although" (with a twinkle in his eye) "I saw you only half an hour ago down by the waterfall. I saw you, though you didn't see me, I'll be bound, eh? ha! ha!"

"Can't say I did," replied the unabashed plunger. "Saw you the other night, though

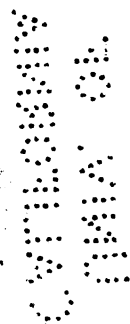
—rather too much of you, in fact ; you were anxious to see me, too—drill a hole in me, you know—haw ! haw ! Didn't see me, though, I'll be bound ; banger of yours that—couldn't, you know, 'cause of the bushes—haw ! haw ! ”

“ How ? what ? are you the fellow who smashed my white rhododendron ? Oh Mary ! you sly little cat ! and I'll be bound you were out on the tiles after him.”

“ Come now, Mr Badger, 'pon my honour, now, too bad that. She knew nothing about it ; I was cruising on my own hook.”

“ Really, uncle, I'm quite innocent, I assure you.”

“ I'll forgive you, I'll forgive everybody, I'll forgive everything ! . Come and kiss your old uncle, you cat—and Burridge, your hand. I've heard your story ; it's a queer one. I think you're a good fellow, a little soft, though, eh ?—aint you a *leetle* bit soft,



now? But you'll find me a most friendly and cool hand--and I'll be glad to see you at the City. Did you ever go to the City, or to the City, Captain?"

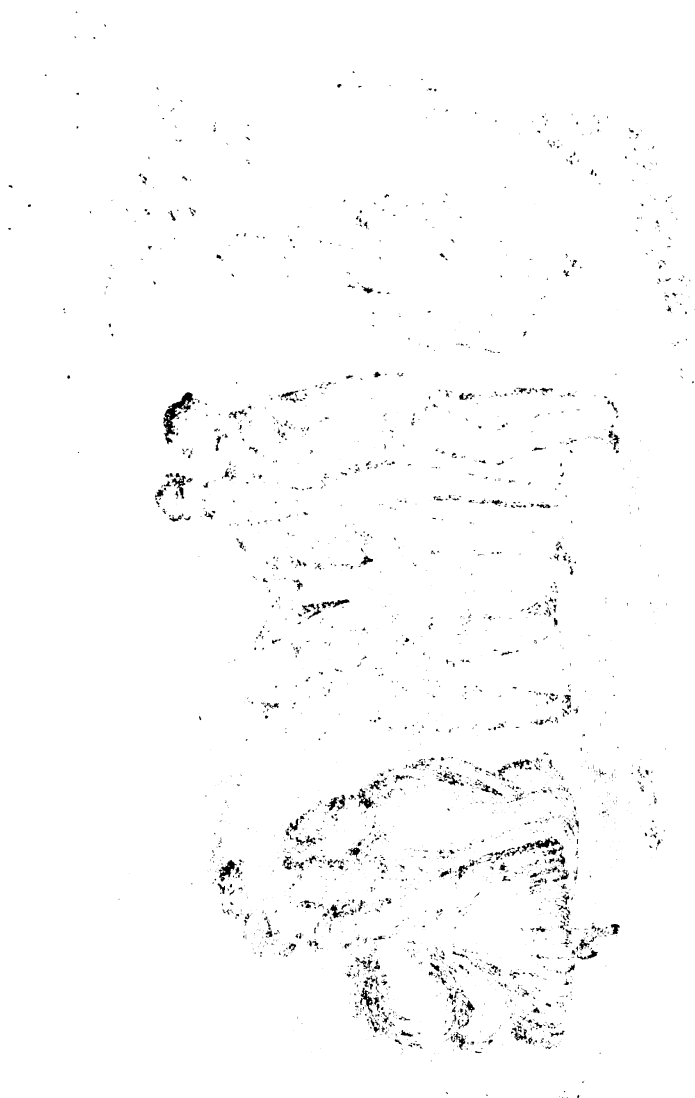
"Not once I did," said the Captain, laughing, "and I got a number of things, most of them of no value, you know; but I was obliged to go to a *commissionaire* in St Paul's to get them back to the club."

"Haw! haw! haw!" roared the Bodger in high glee. "You are a --- but I'll be glad to see you; give me your hand, please, and I'll say I may congratulate you."

"Oh! of course, of course," said the Captain, "--- week after next, about, May."

"Now, a lolpleas!" remonstrated the Bodger with a blush.

"Well, well, I'll not be in a great hurry, I doubt," said Bodger. "Ah! you are a good fellow, Captain; they are amazingly like, but I'm not surprised I didn't know the difference between



now? But you're a cool hand—I like a cool hand—nothing pays so well in the City. Did you ever think of going into the City, Captain?"

"Yes, once I did," said the literal Dolly; "and I got a map and things, and took best advice, you know; but I was obliged to hire a *commissionnaire* at St Paul's to take me back to the club."

"Haw! haw! haw!" roared Badger, in high glee. "You are a—— hang it! I like you; give me your hand again. I suppose I may congratulate you?"

"Oh! of course, of course; it's all settled—week after next, aint it, Mary?"

"Now, Adolphus!" remonstrated Mary, with a blush.

"Well, well, it'll all be in good time, no doubt," said Badger. "Ah! you two Captains are amazingly like, certainly; I'm not surprised I didn't know the difference, though

I met you once, Captain Burridge—don't you remember?—at old Timbrel's at Manchester."

"I remember the old buffer, and meeting a lot of other——"

"Old buffers there, you mean. Well, I was one of them; but you're fatter than our Captain, and not so good-looking—are you, now?"

"Candidly, I think I am, now; and so does Mary, I know."

"But Rose doesn't, and Bruce doesn't, and I don't."

"Ah! I must get Mrs Badger to go in for me, then."

"But we should want a casting vote, so let us give it up, and come along to dinner, and let's be jolly; ten dozen of champagne, and twenty dozen of 'twenty port'—that's the programme! Hip, hip, hurrah!" And so *eximus omnes*, Dolly remarking to me,

"Couldn't wait all night, you know, in that fusty old inn—thought I'd better just come and settle it myself; so I did."

"And you're not savage at me?"

"Savage! a little child might play with me."

Badger was one of those typical Englishmen to whom a happy event instantly suggests the necessity of abnormal acts of deglutition.

Just as the Romans marked a happy day "with a white stone," the Briton is apt to celebrate it with an extra good dinner; and I am bound to say that, notwithstanding our host's regrets and apologies (and they were long and loud) no amount of warning could have produced, in my eyes, a better one than that beneath which the hospitable hermit's table groaned that night.

What a jolly festival it was! Nectar seemed the wines, ambrosia the viands, and

piquant even the somewhat broad humour of the host. The roof rang with his pealing mirth; and again, and again, and again, did he replenish an ample goblet, and drain it in our honour—to our health, to our wealth, to our happiness, to our long life, and to other prospective advantages which he might have overlooked. I really began to be afraid that the threat of the twenty dozen of port was to be carried out.

“There is one thing,” he cried, at last, “that I must and will insist on your all pledging yourselves to before the ladies go, and before the Earl arrives—for he’ll be here immediately—and that is, that you will faithfully promise and vow to use your best endeavours to bring it about and make it so that both the weddings come off on the same day and in the same church—to wit, the church of F——, to this Hermitage adjacent—and that the banquet (and a ban-

quet it shall be) takes place in this the house of John Badger, London citizen of credit and renown."

"Agreed! agreed!" cried Burridge and I.

"Oh! I don't know what papa will say," said Mary; "he knows nothing about anything yet. I'm afraid he may be dreadfully angry and troublesome—I'm afraid he may——"

"Don't you fret about it, little Mary; set your 'cool hand' there at him. He'll arrange the General, never fear; and so that's fixed. And now, ladies (since you *will* go), when the Earl comes, don't say a word to him about all this; let the poor man have his dinner in peace, and leave the business to us afterwards." It was the first time this rather formidable reflection had presented itself to me—this grim apropos-ness of his lordship's arrival—and my countenance fell.

“Don’t be afraid of the Earl, Bruce,” said Badger, perceiving it; “he’s an easy man, and a silent man, and a devilish stupid man; but he’s a gentleman and a good-hearted fellow, too, is Belturbet. By the by—ahem—eh? excuse me—I suppose the settlements will be all right, my boy?”

“Oh yes! I think so. I have next to nothing myself, but I have an aunt who is rich and kind, and she has promised me something very like *carte-blanche*.”

“And if you hadn’t a rich aunt (and here’s to her jolly good health), my boy, Rose has a rich uncle, as, perhaps, you’ll find out some day, if you’re civil to him, and come to see him often enough. Well, well, that’s all right. As for you, Burridge, I hear you’re as rich as a Jew, so you and your old cockatoo of a father-in-law-that-is-to-be may fight it out as you like. Bruce, would it be any relief to you if I was to speak to the Earl?”

I could give you a good character, you know, and that sort of thing—as you like, though.”

“I think I had better speak to the Earl myself,” I said; “it would be more *comme il faut*; thanks all the same.”

“Very well. But make your story short and simple, and don’t use long words; his Lordship aint up to more than ‘*two-syllablers*.’ He’s mortal stupid, poor old Belturbet.”

At last there was the sound of wheels, ringing of bells, hurtling of luggage, light female laughter, and then the Earl was among us.

“Ah! Belturbet,” cried his brother-in-law, “glad to see you—that I am; how is your noble self? Dinner’s laid for you in the library, but, if you’re not ceremonious, you might dine here, and we would be company for you—eh?”

"Oh! here, by all means," said the Earl, who was a tall, gentleman-like, elderly man, with a good but rather heavy countenance.

"So be it, then. Let me introduce to you my two very particular friends, Captain Bruce and Captain BurrIDGE—better known as the Corsican Brothers."

"Ah!" said his lordship, affably, "saw them t'other night in Dublin—very good—ah! Great fellow, Fechter—ah!" And down sat my lord and attacked his dinner, and never word spake he except when asked a question, when he answered in monosyllables. Once, indeed, but once only, did he volunteer a remark, and that was when I happened to say I had been in Jamaica. The Earl, thereupon, laid down his knife and fork, looked at me solemnly for a minute, and then said, "By Jove! were you in Jamaica?" and on my reiterating the assertion, replied, as if in intense aston-

ishment at the coincidence, "By Jove! so was I—ah!"

Clearly the Earl was not likely to put many questions to me, or unnecessarily prolong the impending interview.

Intensely puzzled and mystified he did look, though, when Badger requested him to give me a few minutes' private conversation.

"By all means," he said, however, with great politeness. "Now? or when?"

"Now, if you will be so very kind," I said.

"Certainly—ah!"

In another minute I was in full career, telling my tale of love. The Earl never moved a muscle of his face, but listened to my story as if his mind had been inadvertently left on the other side of St George's Channel.

You don't often meet a really stupid Irish-

man ; but if you do, does it not seem as if nature was trying to make one individual blockhead contribute the share of a score towards the aggregate mass of human stupidity, or towards levelling down his nation to the general average in that respect? I am bound to say, however, that the Earl listened with much gravity to my statement. When I had finished, he said "Ah!" affably—paused, looked at me as if for an idea, and at last, in despair, remarked,—

"I'm not used to this kind of thing, you see, Captain Bruce. I'm a little—a little at sea—ah! there are questions to be asked, I know, but I hate asking questions—ah!" and he glared at me as if for a prompt.

"My solicitors, perhaps, and your lordship's solicitors," said I, "could arrange all business matters, and we need not talk of them. Suffice it to say that my means will

be ample; and as to my birth and social position and general character, my colonel, my brother officers, and hundreds of (I have no doubt mutual) friends will satisfy you on these points; and I hope—I hope you will not dislike me very much, if you give your consent.”

“Ah!” said his lordship; “and Rose? what does she say?”

“She is flattering enough to join me in my request to your lordship.”

“Ah!—she’s a good girl—let us go and see her, ah!” and he held out his hand very cordially; and thus the interview closed.

“All right?” whispered Badger, when we got into the drawing-room.

“I hope so, but his lordship is not very communicative.”

“Never is, you know—hasn’t got it in him—not an idea,” and Badger tapped his

forehead. "Singular," thought I, "that one so gifted should be the offspring of such a very ordinary old gentleman. I lived to like him, though, and to respect him; and when he died—for (*requiescat in pace*) he is gone—my regret was not mere sympathy for his daughter's sorrow. I think it would be wearisome to go into all details, as to how this lawyer wrote to that lawyer, and this aunt to that papa; how counsel gave one opinion and then another; how Spinks was spoken to, and Wylde communed with; how Badger quarrelled furiously with Sir Rowland Richmond, and made it up; how trousseaus were completed, and presents presented, till at last (Badger's kindly whim being honoured), on a bright November morning, Burrige and I, with our respective brides, stood before the altar, in the pretty little old church of F——. And there the two knots were

tied in all safety at last, although not without some risk of a mistake, owing to the indomitable woolliness of the noble lord as to the identity of his son-in-law, and the double of that gallant officer.

It does not do (to my mind, at least, it so appears) to pry into the after domestic life of young couples, whose careers we have only undertaken to supervise until they leave the altar. Surely it is better that the hero and the heroine should here vanish abruptly from the public gaze, glittering with the gems and gawds of the festal occasion, rather than fade from the scene in a drab-coloured atmosphere, extinguished by the appallingly vivid colours of a foreground springing up in front of them—a foreground studded thick with horrors, in pre-Raphaelite style—the obese nurse, the blood-red pass-book, the pea-green perambulator, the infamous feeding-bottle, the ever-

recurring infant; and, thinking thus, here I would finish, but that gratitude to my friend (now uncle) Badger compels me to state that the *déjeuner* (at which both the couples were present) given by him at the Hermitage was a banquet indeed. It was set forth in a marquee pitched upon the lawn, and laid down with a floor for a ball in the evening.

The table blazed with plate and bloomed with exotics, and (to quote from the local newspaper) "everything was there that could gorge the eye and appease the appetite."

Around it were ranged many and many a trusty friend, here and there in combinations rather startling to a connoisseur in social chemistry, Mrs Badger outdoing all her previous achievements in the marshalling of her guests. Aunt Blogg and Sir Rowland Richmond — a ferocious-looking old

martinet—were told off to each other, as were John Blackstock and Burr ridge's grand-mamma. The latter, awfully deaf and slightly doting, enlivened the proceedings by every now and then inquiring in a far-carrying falsetto, "if in his" (John Blackstock's) "candid opinion Mr Badger wasn't a little like the butcher at Wellingborough—just a little, now, about the mouth and eyes?" Then there were friends from the City, and friends from the court, and friends from the camp—friends from England, Scotland, and Ireland; an omnium-gatherum of people of all kinds of grades and professions, but happily combined by the bond of a common goodwill to the young couples, and by the blithesome *bon-homie* of the exuberant host. A jollier marriage-breakfast I never saw, and as it was my own, that is saying a good deal.

At last it was time for us to go; but ere

we went, up sprung the London citizen of credit and renown to propose our healths, and he handled the topic with such Homeric fire, and surrounded our marvellous adventures with such a champagne combination of mist and sparkle, as not a little to delight and puzzle his audience. Amid the cheers and laughter and "good healths" which succeeded we made our escape.

"Don't follow them," cried Badger, "there's a clothes-basketful of old shoes all ready here, and we can fire at them as they drive past the tent." So the company remained in ambush in the marquee, aunt Blogg alone disobeying the host's order, and pursuing us into the house.

"Just to say 'God bless you' once more, my dears," she explained.

I was right glad to get the opportunity of thanking her. By letter I had done so, of course, and fervently; but what can a letter

express compared with living words? "Dear aunt," I said, "it is for me to say 'God bless *you*!'" It is for me to wish that wish every day and hour of my life; you have made me the happiest man in all the world. I wish I had words to thank you, but my heart is too full—I can only say 'God bless *you*!'—from my heart I say it; and, after all, what better wish can the heart of man devise?"

"And oh! dear aunt," cried Rose, "believe me that I join him in that wish; I hope—I know I shall try to be a good niece, and to repay with my warmest love, at least, what you have done for us. God bless you, dear aunt!" She threw her arms round the good old lady's neck and kissed her, and the good old lady retired precipitately into the interior, sobbing that she must go away, or she would make a fool of herself.

We were soon ready for a start, and nothing remained to be accomplished but the private adieux of the two couples.

“We are both ‘Doubles’ now, Dolly,” I cried, as we grasped each other’s hands in the hall.

“Yes; and as you got me my wife, and I got you yours, we’re ‘Quits’ too. Ha! ha! ha!

“‘DOUBLES AND QUILTS!’”

And we both laughed loudly, for a small joke goes a long way with a light heart—which I hope you have, dear reader, for your own sake as well as mine.

THE END.

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